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[WITH AN EXCLAMATION THAT BROUGHT IONE TO THE DOOR—GREVILLE CAUGHT MARY IN HIS ARMS!]

WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

CHAPTER XV.

IONE was surprised and greatly annoyed at the fact of Greville remaining in town instead of doing as she expected, and rushing wildly in her train. She had imagined him frantic in his dismay at her absence, and most certainly she looked for his appearance on the following day.

His loving, reproachful letter instead made her angry. She was coquette in the worst sense of the meaning. She delighted to use the power of fascination Nature had bestowed upon her to torment and torture. It was pleasure to her to feel she had this power of making another and a stronger than herself suffer so acutely.

It had been this curious pleasure as much as anything else that had caused her to rush away in the erratic and foolish way she had done.

Her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkled as

she conjured up a vision of Greville coming home and finding her gone. It would enhance her value, she determined, and then she must have the gown she had settled on.

Already she had proudly boasted that Noris—the great and unrivalled Noris, the freak of the fashionable woman's world for the moment—had not only arranged to make her season's gowns, but had, indeed, solicited the favour of Lady Greville Earne's patronage.

She had invented this easily, never doubting that the Parisienne would gladly undertake her orders, and so back up her statement; and it can therefore be imagined what sort of mental condition her mother's telegram left her in.

Of course she must go to Paris at once, and of course she must leave some lie behind to exonerate her conduct.

Ione never, by any chance, told the truth when she could use a lie instead.

Moreover, she did not want even Greville to know the real reason of her hasty departure. He was such a fool, she determined. The first thing he would do would be to tell some one of the women whom she intended to outshine altogether that his little wife had gone to

Paris to beseech Noris to undertake her toilettes.

That must be prevented at all hazards. Ione had no wish to appear before the world in her true colours. It was her simplicity, youthfulness, and apparent unsophistication that was counted as one of, if not the greatest, of her charms. She meant to hoodwink the world as long as she could.

So she thought for a moment, and then wrote the untruth about her mother's illness, packed up in a flash of lightning, as it were, and disappeared, quite unconscious that she had left behind her the clue to her actions, and, it might be, to the real truth and condition of her character.

"Of course, he will follow me to-morrow," she said to herself, as she crossed the Chancel and revelled in the looks of admiration showered upon the lovely young woman in her regal furs, travelling in so grand a style; and to her mother she said the same, indifferently, "Greville will be here to-night. I expect he will have nearly gone out of his mind!"

Madame la Princess looked grave.

"You have a splendid position. Don't play foolish pranks with it!" she said, seriously. Ione tossed her head.

"I know my position very well," she said, coolly. "Greville is my slave. He would die, I verily believe, if I wished him to do so."

Ione's mother was silent. To herself she was thinking, "Audley would have done more honour to such a fate. There is something in Audley that Ione, with all her beauty, will never possess. Audley is an Archdale. She is in her proper groove now. Ione has some of my people's blood in her veins. I have a fear sometimes when I think of her future."

Lady Greville thoroughly enjoyed herself in Paris. The interest and attention she attracted delighted her vanity, and her interview with Nora was absolutely successful. Her gowns would be put in hand immediately.

It was almost a blow to her when dinner was over to hear that Greville had not arrived. She was furious with him.

Her mother took the opportunity of speaking a few wise words.

"Be warned by this, Ione!" she said, "It is most evident to me that Greville is seriously annoyed, apart from any question of affection. You must remember the women of his class never do these *outré* things."

Ione was silent, only tapped the floor impatiently with her foot. She would have liked to have retaliated on her mother in some way, but felt somehow powerless to do so. The Princess, however well she posed as the world, was truthful and open enough with this one of her children at least.

"Be careful!" the mother urged again. "You have great power now, but such things are ephemeral; and, moreover, I have frequently told you, you have not yet discovered the real nature of your husband!"

Ione laughed at this. Who could know her power so well as herself? She put the best face on the matter, and treated it with contemptuous indifference; but, all the same, she was furious, and her vanity, the most vulnerable point in her nature, suffered keenly.

She returned to London on the Tuesday. Greville was at the station to meet her.

He was very pale. No one but himself could know what this moment meant to him. He longed and dreaded to see his wife.

Love and hope urged the plea that she would not be with him five seconds before she would tell the truth and confess to her little deception; but against this hope, waged something vague and painful in his thoughts, warning him he would be disappointed.

His visit to Barrackbourne had done him good in every way. It had been so pleasant, so peaceful, so happy in his dear old home. The first acute pang of pain at the discovery of Ione's strange conduct was soothed almost into forgetfulness. He had been like the Greville of old days, and yet there was a difference.

His mother had received his explanation of Ione's journey without any comment, but, like Dick, she felt there was something wrong. It might be a very little something, just the faintest suggestion of a cloud, but the cloud was there all the same.

She was glad, for this reason, that there were guests at the Castle. It prevented any chance of a strain arising between her boy and herself, for unless he invited her confidence she would not force it, and she was, too, more than glad that the guests were who they were.

Greville had derived unconscious comfort from his brief intercourse with Mary and Esther. The one roused the full, passionate admiration he held in his heart for all things pure and poetic; her music thrilled him to his soul, and the memory of that glimpse of her womanliness, as she had sat rocking Otho to sleep on her knee, had awakened in him a sentiment that was as lasting as it was indefinite.

Esther Gall's powerful will, her independence, her abrupt, clever speech, were, compared to Mary's gentle manner, like a strong wind coming after a sighing breeze; and the know-

ledge of the hard-working, industrious lives both these girls led seemed to make his conscience prick and spur his ambitious into action.

He travelled up to town with them in company with Dick, and when he said goodbye to Mary he held her hand a moment, as it were, voluntarily.

"How am I to thank you, Mrs. Arbuthnot?" he said, earnestly. "Your kindness to my mother is—"

"Is nothing!" Mary broke in, hurriedly, with that wave of colour to her face that made her so lovely. "I—I am happy in doing what I have done, Lord Greville. Some day, perhaps, I may tell you why!"

"I hope we shall meet often!" the young man said, warmly. "Do you know, Mrs. Arbuthnot, I always have a curious fancy about you. I feel as though I had known you before, as if there were some link of old acquaintance between us. I can scarcely describe what I mean."

"Perhaps!" Mary said, with the colour lingering in her cheeks, "perhaps I remind you of someone you have known in the past?" "It is your eyes," Greville said, dreamily, his mind going again over the course that would not clear. "They haunt me! I seem to remember them so well!"

But at this moment Dick and Esther joined them. General *en recevoir* were exchanged, and the four separated.

"Your visit has done you a world of good, my darling!" Esther cried, enthusiastically; and then she sighed, "I could have stayed on there forever, Mary! What 'bits' there were! I never regretted my absent brushes so much before!"

"Never mind. Think, only another month, you will be there again. I am sure it will be a delight to you to paint dear Lady Barrackbourne!"

"That it will!" Esther said, warmly. "She is an angel, if ever there was another on earth besides yourself! You will accept the engagement she suggested to go down at the same time, and take part in these festivities that Lord Greville is going to inaugurate in honour of her birthday?"

Mary blushed a little.

"I hope it was not very wrong or presumptuous of me, Esther," she said; "but I told Lady Barrackbourne I would rather not regard the visit in the light of an engagement. I prefer to do what I can do from pleasure, not from duty. She—she understood me at once; and I shall go as a guest."

"And quite right, too!" declared Esther, proudly. "Presumptuous, my darling! You could never be that! I tell you what it is, Mary. I have quite lost my heart to Lord Greville! Not because he is so handsome—although, as a specimen of manly beauty, he is superb!—but because he is so kind—just the sort of man I like! Wasn't he absolutely sweet to that little child! I loved him when I saw them together!"

"Otho has great charm!" Mary said, hurriedly; and then the cab stopped at their door, and they were at home again, and the subject of Greville dropped for a time.

Greville and Dick dined together that night; but both men were strangely silent and preoccupied.

Greville's mind was fixed on the morrow and Ione's return. He longed to see her again.

The power of her fascination, the spell of her beauty was strong upon him; and yet he dreaded to see her, to hold her in his arms, and kiss her lips—the lips that might perchance speak a lie!

Dick's thoughts were where they always were now. Mary Arbuthnot had grown deeper and firmer in his heart's most holy of holies during the past few days. Hope and fear jostled one against the other. His love had trembled on his lips more than once while at Barrackbourne; but when he would have spoken he hesitated. She was so unconscious, she was so easy in her sweet, gentle ways

He dared not risk losing the happiness of the moment by jeopardising the future, so he had let the opportunity go, and doubt and hope jostled on anew.

But, deeply sunk as he was in his own affairs, he had time and perception enough to notice Greville's gravity.

"I hope to Heaven that woman will not give him the misery I feared!" he said to himself as he parted from his cousin. "Poor Greville! poor old chap! Ah, you have done badly, I am afraid! Your love is built on a treacherous, shifty sand, that must mean destruction to your happiness sooner or later!"

He saw very little of Greville during the next fortnight. Some most important legal business took all his attention, and he was compelled to excuse himself from nearly every social engagement during that time.

In the few spare hours he had he managed to call once or twice on Mrs. Arbuthnot, but he was unlucky enough to find her out every time.

Esther was always at her studio, and Dick would turn there almost involuntarily. If he could not see the woman he loved, he could at least talk of her with one who shared his love.

Ione's picture was framed and ready for the Academy; and Esther always gave a sigh of contentment when she realised that task was finished.

"I should like to paint your cousin!" she said in her abrupt way to Dick on the occasion of one of these visits. "What a splendid face he has!"

"Greville was always handsome," Dick said, half wearily. He never knew how much he had been longing to see Mary until he experienced disappointment.

"I will tell him of your wish, Miss Gall. I dine there to-night."

"Lord Greville will not sit to me," Esther said, quietly standing before her canvas, and working away, apparently, most industriously, while her eyes were drawn to the man's thoughtful tired face, and rested on him with a tender, caressing expression. If she could only do something to smooth away the weariness and the sort of shadow that rested on that face!

"Why not?" Dick asked, with some surprise.

"Lady Greville does not like me," Esther answered just as quietly. She stopped back from her easel and looked at her work with her head on one side. "We very nearly came to blows, Mr. Fraser!"

Dick laughed.

"I would back you to exterminate Ione if you cared to use all your strength!"

Esther laughed too.

"I think Mary got quite frightened at last; our mutual dislike was so strong."

"Did—did Mrs. Arbuthnot and Lady Greville meet often?" Dick asked hurriedly.

"Never! I have too great a respect for my darling to submit her to gratuitous insults," Esther said hotly. Then she turned abruptly. "Oh! I forgot. I am so sorry. I should not have said that, Mr. Fraser. Please forgive me!"

"So," Dick said quietly, "Ione was rude to you Miss Gall."

"She did not like me. My manners are not the best in the world. I am quite sure I was very rude to her."

Dick was silent. Esther went on working, her face flushed almost into prettiness. She looked across at him after a moment.

"I am the child of a poor man—a common man—I fear not altogether a reputable man, Mr. Fraser. The remembrance of this makes me over-sensitive. If it were not that I am shielded by such a nature as Mary's I might grow foolish on the subject; but with Mary friendship is a great leveller. From the first we have been equal in her eyes. She the child of—"

Dick's heart was beating a little quicker. Esther's pause was significant. Her words

could not have been plainer. Then Mary was of noble birth—maybe as good or better than his own. It was a pleasurable thought, not so much for himself as for her. It was only right that such delicate beauty and refinement should come from a noble source, he said to himself—yet, paradoxically, he had never liked Esther Galt so much as at this moment. He admired her for her art, and for her bold, frank, straightforward character.

"True to the core!" he thought, as he looked at her, "absolutely loyal, honest, and upright—the best friend in the world! I am glad that she possesses such an one!"

"I shall, nevertheless, broach the subject of this portrait to-night, Miss Galt," he said, when he rose to go, "and we shall see."

"I could do it at Barrackbourne. I paint very quickly, and if Lord Greville would sit for an hour or so. I have done little Otho—from memory. Look!"

Dick smiled at the pretty baby face.

"How clever you are! You know Otho is up in town, staying with the Grevilles."

Esther shook her head.

"Lady Barrackbourne did not mention it in her last letter to Mary!"

Dick brushed his hat with his glove.

"Lady Greville insisted on having the child. She says she wants him to grow to like her better. Otho had the most extraordinary aversion to her before she was married!"

"Poor little Otho." Esther said involuntarily as she shook hands in her short way, which Dick had grown accustomed to by now. "I don't think I shall tell Mary he is in town. She will want to rush off and see him."

"She must see him," Dick said, hurriedly. He would have tried to obtain the greatest treasures of the earth if he thought he would give Mary pleasure by so doing.

Esther thanked him in a soft way that was new to her, and when she was alone she walked to her easel and stood looking at her work.

"It is only natural," she said, in a dull sort of way. "It is what should be. If only she were free what happiness she could have. His wife, the wife of such a man!" there was a red spot now on each of the girl's cheeks.

"Honoured, beloved, worshipped! Oh! Mary, if it could only be for you, my darling; and I should be their friend, always their best and truest."

"Oh! Dick, Dick, Dick! Why did I ever meet you, my darling, my darling!"

If Dick Fraser had retraced his steps at that moment he would have seen something that would have pained and astonished him beyond measure.

Only a girl crouched up on some cushions, her face buried in her hands, weeping bitterly.

But when he would have contrasted this sorrowful figure with the strong, self-reliant Esther Galt of ordinary moments, he would have known without words that it was no small master that changed her so utterly, and shattered the proud, strong spirit he knew so well.

But Dick did not return, and Esther wept out her sorrow alone, growing calmer as the passion of yearning and hopeless love faded a little.

When Mary remarked anxiously on the girl's white cheeks that night, Esther said most truthfully she had had a hard day's work, and was only very tired.

CHAPTER XVI.

GREVILLE EARNE was honestly delighted to see his cousin.

"If you had not turned up to-night," he said, seriously, "I should have bombarded you in your own den at the Temple. You are the very man I want to see. You have heard of Spencer's proposal to me. What do you advise?"

"Stand by all means," Dick said, earnestly. "You know I have always told you to make Parliament your goal. You are the sort of

man we want, Grev; and think how delighted Aunt Katherine will be?"

Greville's face, which had a rather worn, tired look, brightened considerably.

"Dear mother! I suppose she thinks I shall be a second Beaconsfield, only much greater."

"Your wife does not object to the idea?" Dick asked, lighting a cigarette. They were in Greville's smoking-room.

"I have not consulted with her yet," Greville answered, in a sort of constrained way. Then, with a lightness that Dick could see was not natural at the moment, "Ione is a baby. She wants nothing but brightness and sunshine. Time enough in the future to let her puzzle her young brains over politics."

Dick smoked away in silence.

"Norchester is a splendid constituency," he said, when he did speak. "I don't mind confessing to you, Greville, that I envy you considerably."

Greville slapped him heartily on the shoulder.

"I envy myself now it is settled, Dick. I tell you, old chap, I am sick of a drone's life. I have always felt ashamed of myself when I have contrasted my career with yours; and lately—lately," Greville said, planting his back to the fireplace, and staring down at his feet, "it has seemed to me as though the women workers of to-day, with their industry and courage, are just a simple reproach to a great hulking fellow like me. I—I can't do anything decent, Dick. I don't know enough about anything, but I may be able to do some little good if I go into Parliament, at all events I mean to try."

Dick said some quiet words, earnest and affectionate. Was it a sympathetic chord between them that brought up Esther and Mary to his eyes when Greville spoke of "women workers?"

"Do you know," he said, after a while, "you are looking jolly seedy, Grev. What have you been doing to yourself, eh?"

"I am suffering from a sort of insomnia," Greville answered, quickly. "Can't sleep a wink. You know I hate town for long together. One jaunt down to Barrackbourne next week will do us all good. I think I shall send Otho back to-morrow. The child is far from well. I fancy he frets after my mother. I know she frets after him."

"Barrackbourne is the proper place for him," Dick said, quietly. "Send him back to Aunt Katherine. I wonder she could bring herself to part with him."

"It was a wrench, I believe, but she did it to please us. Ione has been so anxious to have the child, and she is greatly upset about him. I tell her it is always the way with children, particularly delicate ones like Otho. Once their ordinary little routine of life is upset they immediately fall ill."

"They get over-fed, and fed with the wrong things," Dick said, with an air of superior knowledge. "Have I time to run up and see him before dinner? You know I have a weak corner in my heart for Otho, poor little chap!"

"I will take you up myself," Greville said, and as they walked upstairs he added, "I have promised him a great treat. He is to see Mrs. Arbuthnot before he goes back. Ione is going to write and ask both she and Miss Galt to luncheon. I hope they will come."

"I fancy you could offer Mrs. Arbuthnot no greater bait. She loves children!" Dick said. Greville glanced at him, and a dull, curious sort of envy came into his heart. It was not defined, it took no legitimate form or shape. It was only there—and there it remained, in company with that sort of vague disappointment that had grown almost an old acquaintance during the past fortnight.

As they passed Ione's door she heard them, and called her husband by name.

"Go on, I will come up!" Greville said, hurriedly.

Ione ran to meet him, pouting.

"Wicked Greville!" she said. "You promised to come and see my new gown before

I put it on, and you have been talking instead to that horrid Dick!"

"I would rather see the dress on you, my pearl!" Greville said, a little unsteadily.

Ione's beauty, her fascination, was too strong for him. It was only when he was away from her he could remember the imperfections. When he was with her she could do what she wished with him. It was the blind infatuation of the senses—a colourable, splendid imitation of love, but utterly lacking in all that elevates and purifies the heart.

Ione nestled in his arms. She was always changing her method of wearing her hair. To-night it was soft, loose and fluffy, like a mass of silk that had lain in the sun.

"Kiss me, darling!" she whispered, laying her head on his shoulder, and patting his arm with her little hand. "If you say you are really sorry, I will forgive you this time."

Greville kissed the smiling, pouting lips a dozen times.

"Are you a witch, Ione?" he asked, unsteadily, as he put her from him.

She laughed and curled herself into his arms again.

"Yes, I am a witch, and I have got you, body and soul!" she said, in a sort of merry way, with a mocking sound in her voice. "You must not try and get away from me, Greville!"

"Do you think I want to do such a thing?" the man asked, passionately.

Ione sighed, and laid her head on his shoulder.

"Love must die one day!" she said, dreamily.

Greville held her closer and closer.

"Why do you say such things, Ione?" he said, with real pain in his voice. "My dear, my wife, you are cruel!"

Ione sprang away from him with a laugh. It was her delight to tease him, to work upon his feelings, to keep him always at opera pitch, as it were.

"I am a witch—all witches are cruel!" she cried, as she held her lovely gown in her hand, and danced round about him till a clock chimed an hour, and she gave a little shriek and pushed him from the room.

"Go—go at once!" she cried. "I am not nearly finished, and I ought to be in the drawing-room. Now go, do you hear me? No, you shall have no more kisses now. I must forget I am a witch, and grow into quiet, staid, Lady Greville again!"

She stood before her long, silver-mounted mirror, one of her costly whims, and laughed scornfully back at her reflection.

"Gather all those curls into one big bunch," she said, curtly, to her maid, "and put the tiara below them, so they give me height. So much for mamma's wisdom," she said to herself. "As if I did not know my power! Bah! Greville shall grow to learn it more and more. I can make him mad if I like. Someday I will try him. I have not forgiven him for treating me as he did when I went to Paris. He shall be punished when I feel in the mood to make him suffer!"

She regarded her brilliant reflection with great satisfaction. She had a passion for jewels, and her bodice, head and throat was ablaze with diamonds.

"What a difference!" she thought to herself, as she went back into the past, and recalled all her old hopes and ambitions. "We have not done badly, after all! I don't envy Andley," she added, with a toss of her head; "and yet a year ago I should have thought it simply Paradise if I could have gone to the Archdeacon as she is doing now. *Nous avons changé tout cela!* My fan and gloves, Suzanne. Did you go up to the nursery? Is Lord Barrackbourne asleep?"

The maid answered in the affirmative. Ione drew on her gloves with a curious expression on her face, then swept through the doorway, and downstairs.

Dick Fraser looked rather grave as he greeted her, so much so that she inquired the reason.

"I think Otho is very ill," he said, quietly. Ione's brows contracted, and she gave a little start that made all her diamonds quiver. She did not know that Dick had been upstairs to see the child.

"Otho, very ill! Oh! no, don't say so, please Dick!" she said in a most heart-broken way. "I left him only an hour before, and I assure you I thought him quite happy. We have become such good friends! Oh! dear, you make me perfectly wretched."

"Perhaps it is nothing much," Dick hastened to say quickly, quite deceived by her manner, and always averse to hurting anyone's feelings; "but I really think the child is better in the country. He is so delicate you know."

"I shall send him back to-morrow," Greville said, decidedly; "in fact, I think I will take him back myself."

"Oh, dear!" Ione said, with a sigh, "and then your mother will never let him come to me again! She will think I don't know how to take care of him! Let him stay one day longer, Greville, to see if he gets better. Dr. Black shall come and see him in the morning; and, remember, you said I was to write and ask Mrs. Arbuthnot and Miss Gall to lunch while he was here!"

"You must ask them to-morrow, then, my darling, for Otho will go back to Yorkshire the day after!"

So it was settled, but circumstances changed this plan. Next day Otho was so ill he could not be moved, and Ione was in a terrible state of mind. She had the best doctors called in, and insisted on nursing the child herself, which course of action resulted in a furious war with Otho's old and beloved nurse, and terminated in the said nurse's instant dismissal from her duties by Lady Greville's orders.

The opinion of the doctors was that the child had evidently eaten something which, to his most delicate organisation, had proved almost poisonous. The attack left the little fellow very prostrate, and Dick could not look at the small white face without a pang. The truth was carefully concealed from Lady Barrackbourne, and very few people were informed of the serious nature of the illness. Mary was one of the few!

"Oh! how I wish I might see him, dear little Otho!" she said, again and again to Esther, with tears in her eyes.

She was quite unhappy about him. He had twined himself into her heart; and one day in almost an involuntary way she dressed herself, and drove to the large house in the large square.

A carriage was at the door, and Ione was just passing in as Mary alighted from the cab. It pleased Lady Greville to be condescending to the simply-dressed woman in the close bonnet and thick veil. Mary was rarely seen without this veil when she was in the streets alone.

"I have had my first drive to-day. I could not leave the poor little mite before; but now the new nurse has got used to him," Ione said, in her grand, languid manner. "Pray come in, Mrs. Arbuthnot! So good of you to call. Let me order you some tea!"

Mary hesitated.

"I—I wonder," she said, in her simple, unaffected way, "if I might see little Otho?"

Ione smiled, and threw off her wraps as soon as she entered the hall.

"I will send and inquire if the Earl is asleep," she said, with a stress on the word "Earl," as though to reprove Mary for her familiarity in addressing the child by his Christian name.

Mary's colour rose. She was about to draw back, and then a memory of Lady Barrackbourne's sweet face, and the pretty, clinging ways of the child rose before her. She could not go without seeing him. The message was brought back.—

"His lordship was awake!"

"Will you follow the maid?" Ione said in

the same patronising fashion. "I am a little tired, if you will excuse me!"

Mary bowed, and went up the stairs, and Ione looked after her with a frown disfiguring her face.

Even in this quiet, unassuming guise, Mary was every bit her equal. Indeed, there was that about the slender gray-dressed figure which she—Ione—did not possess, and would never possess.

"At any rate, she knows there is a vast social difference between us," was the almost vulgar thought in her mind as she entered her room, and greeted a visitor who was awaiting her.

Mary's eyes were full of unshed tears as she bent over the bed on which Otho's small, thin frame lay. As she whispered his name he turned with a cry of joy, and put up his two little arms.

"Mrs. Arbuthnot! Mrs. Arbuthnot!" he said, in his pretty cooing voice, and then the agony pent up in his child's heart broke forth. "Grannie! I want grannie; take me to grannie!"

The nurse hurried up to him, but Mary had him in her arms.

"Oh, please let me! See, I will wrap this about him. He knows me; he will be so good!"

She had taken off her bonnet and veil, and looked so lovely there was no resisting her.

The nurse helped her to sit in a chair by the fire, and watched her as she nestled the small atom of humanity in her arms.

There was no doubt about the child's pleasure. His tears were soon dried, and smiles came instead—weak, faint, little, shadowy smiles—that lit up the pretty wan face, and made Mary's heart ache and yearn over the small creature.

She was shocked at his appearance. He looked as though he had been snatched from the jaws of death itself.

She stayed with him nearly half an hour—talking, singing, and laughing. It was almost a pain to leave him, but she felt she had already stayed too long.

She put him back in his bed, promising to come again very soon, and so checking the tears that were ready to fall at her going.

Her bonnet was on, and her small mantle settled, when the door opened, and Greville appeared.

His face lit up when he saw her, and he thanked her with eloquent warmth for her goodness in coming.

"He goes back to Barrackbourne as soon as possible," he said, feeling his eyes drawn to her exquisite face with that same feeling of reverence mingling with his admiration that always came when he saw her. "Will you come again and see him before he goes? Oh! I forgot. Of course, you are coming to Yorkshire too. Do you hear that, Otho? See what is in store for you?"

They did not say very much. Greville sat chatting to the child, and Mary tied on her veil, and drew on her gloves.

As they turned to leave the room he said something, and she raised her eyes.

Greville gave an exclamation. It was as though a curtain had been drawn from the past.

He remembered all now. Involuntarily his hand went out to her.

"Ah! I know you now!" he said. "It was not fancy after all! How could I forget those eyes? I—"

He stopped hurriedly. He had spoken without thinking; and it suddenly came to him perhaps she would rather he had not spoken.

Mary's sweet, low voice came to his rescue. "I wondered if you would remember some day!" Then, a little hurriedly, "I—I have tried so often to tell you to—to try and—"

"Don't!" Greville said, eagerly. He was still holding her hand unconsciously. Now she drew it from him. "You must say nothing. Let it be a dream—a dream!" he repeated, looking deep into the soul of those

magnificent eyes. "That will be a link from the past to make our friendship stronger in the future!"

They went downstairs in silence. Just as they reached the landing by the drawing-room the door opened, and a slight, dark man appeared.

"*Au revoir!* We meet, then, to-night, and afterwards at Barrackbourne. *Tout de choses à Greville!*" He waved his hand with a foreign gesture, and before Greville could stop him he had flown downstairs, and was out of the hall.

"Do you know who that was?" Greville said to Mary with half a laugh. "That was your rival, Paul Angelotti! I ought to have presented him to you, Mrs. Arbuthnot. Two such artists should know one—"

Greville ceased speaking hurriedly. Mary had stood like a statue, watching that dark Italian face vanish out of sight.

There was a blaze of light before her eyes, a dumb, confused noise in her ears. Her hand, resting on the old oaken balustrade, refused her support, and, with a sigh that was almost a sob, she reeled uncertainly, faltered, and would have fallen to the ground had not Greville turned as her unconscious figure huddled against him; and, with an exclamation of dismay that brought Ione through the doorway, caught her in his strong arms!

(To be continued.)

HIS ICE QUEEN.

—30—

CHAPTER XIII.

BLACK BEECHES.

It was a brilliant winter day when Frank Stanley arrived at Mears Norton Towers to see pretty Lady Marie St. Clare, and, after his interview with her, started off again in Lord Carstairs' dog-cart for the Priory at Harlington on the wings of love.

Snow had fallen, and coated the roads and paths with a glittering carpet. The leafless branches of the trees sparkled in the sunshine.

The birds were tame and chirped in shrill, appealing voices; worms were not easy to dig out of the frozen ground, and they wanted crumbs.

The air was clear, fresh and invigorating, but the frost had not been a very strong one.

The village boys were doing their best to render the footpaths dangerous to passers-by, and the roads to horses, with their slides, but the Earl of Carstairs' fine stepper passed over them in safety.

A shower of snow-balls came from behind a frosted hedge from the blue fingers of the troublesome urchins, but Frank Stanley only smiled as he brushed the frozen particles from his clothing, amidst a chorus of laughter from the children, and regrets and condemnatory phrases from the well-trained groom.

It was nothing to Frank that the cold was setting in to pinch the poor—that coals were scarce, and clothing thin—that the troubles of burst water-pipes were about to begin.

He was as happy as happy could be that afternoon, for he was going to see Geraldine FitzHerbert again.

It seemed just the very season to visit his "Ice Queen." She would be in her own pure cold, sparkling element. His mind was full of her as he was whisked through the white country at over twelve miles an hour.

His thoughts went back to that only time he had seen her in the full bloom of her proud beauty. She had looked like a stately white lily, with the hoar-frost upon it. The idea was pretty in fancy, although practically impossible.

At any rate, so he thought of her. Lovers are not the most sensible of animals when the moon of love is at the full.

Remembrance carried him back to the night

of the fancy dress ball, and how he had fallen a victim to the spell of her beauty the moment his eyes rested upon her wonderfully lovely face—his nerves thrilled as he once more in fancy held her in his arms. His heart beat loud and fast as he muttered her name.

Frank Stanley was very sincerely in love, and ready to go through fire and water to gain the darling of his fancy.

How would she receive him? Would she give him a warm and kindly welcome?

These were the questions which were passing through his brain.

Kindly? Yes, perhaps. Warm? He smiled in reply to his own query. No, it was too soon for that. The snow must melt before the warmth would come. It was winter now, but the spring would follow in due course.

All he wanted just then was to see that wonderful look in the great dark eyes—that promise of life upon which he hung his hope.

In through the well-shrubbed garden of the ancient Priory, in which the spiders had held high revel, and hung their silvery threads from bough to bough, where the holly berries peeped out red and bright ready for Christmas, and up before the quaint old door in dashing style.

The Priory was the very picture of what a priory should be, with its ecclesiastical windows and its ivy clad walls, its dark niches and mysterious old-world corners.

"Shall I take the horse to Parson Bramley's for a rest, sir?" asked the groom, as he touched his hat respectfully. "We generally do when we come so far—and he's been clipped, sir, so it's rather cold for him to stand about."

By which the man meant that the horse had been clipped, not the clergyman. Nor was he only thinking of the quadruped.

Mr. Bramley was, as he called it to himself, one of the good old-fashioned sort, and there was always a welcome for man as well as horse at the Parsonage. The hot spiced ale which flowed from that hospitable source was thing not to be overlooked.

Frank, glad not to be hurried, assented eagerly to the proposition, and said he would join him at Mr. Bramley's when he was ready to start for The Towers, even before the door was opened; and away drove the man, never once looking back. Perhaps he was not anxious to know whether Mr. Stanley was admitted or not under the above-named circumstances! At any rate, he certainly did not wait to see.

Mrs. and Miss FitzHerbert were not at home. It had never once struck Frank that they would be out, and that he would not see his stately white lily.

The news came to him with a shock. He stared in the face of the butler, then after the retreating horse and dog-cart, and back at the butler again with such evident dismay that the man noticed it.

"If it is anything very particular, sir, I could tell you where the ladies are this afternoon!" said he, confidentially.

Frank took the hint at once, and half-a-sovereign thereupon changed hands with marvellous rapidity.

"I was not authorized to send visitors on, sir," continued the butler, in a low voice. "Perhaps you will kindly see the ladies by accident!"

"To be sure," laughed Frank, "only tell me where the accident is to occur! And I had better give you my card."

"Thank you, sir, if you would. The ladies are gone to skate on the lake at the Black Beeches. It lies in the wood, about half-a-mile along the main road."

"Thank you," replied Frank, briskly. "I know the spot. The Beeches are one of the sights of the neighbourhood. I have been there. I am much obliged to you, I'm sure."

"Not at all, sir. Very glad to be of any use," and with a grave bow the man received the card upon a silver salver, which he raised for the purpose from the hall table, and wait-

ing for Frank to retire, he closed the door with a smile.

"Gone on one of the ladies," he murmured. "It would be the elder if it were my taste. There's more life about her, more flesh and blood, as one might say; and it's the fashion to go in for older women in these days, too, so people say. 'Bread and butter misses' and blondes are at a discount," and the door of the pantry closed upon the opinions of Mrs. FitzHerbert's grave butler—grave professionally, but with a vein of humour under the well-nigh blank-looking exterior.

And before that pantry door closed Frank was out of the drive and well upon his way to the Black Beeches, walking with a swinging stride, indicating health and strength, as well as an eager desire to get to his journey's end.

He turned in through the wood path with a heart which beat with the full, true pulses of hope; passed under the leafless, frosted branches of those strong giants of the forest, still he caught sight of the lake.

There, before him, was a picture of beautiful scene. He stood still to gaze at it.

The lake was crowded with a number of well-dressed ladies, and a few gentlemen to bear them company, while the sun was setting in a rosy glory in the West, the ruby rays piercing through the tree-branches with a rich, warm glow, and lighting up the fairy scene most pleasantly.

The trees closed the lake in with a circle of protesting arms, spreading and interlacing around it most artistically, while the bank was clothed with dead fern leaves, rendered exquisite by the cunning hand of King Frost, and many sorts of shrub and evergreen.

Here, again, the gossamers had been at work, and the sun's rays fell upon the silver threads looped from leaf to branch, and branch to stem.

Anxious as Frank was to get to the girl who had so ennobled his fancy, he stood watching the beauty of the scene, lying so peaceful and still before him—still, save for the circling stream of beautiful women who glided smoothly upon the surface of the frozen water, and the silvery laughter, which came to him as an accompaniment to the whirr of skates, as their wearers drove them along.

When Frank had taken in the scene, his eyes passed eagerly from figure to figure till they rested upon one more graceful than all the rest, going along with a smooth even motion beside another lady.

Their backs were towards him; but he felt certain that the two were Mrs. FitzHerbert and her daughter.

The former was dressed in rich fur; but Geraldine did not seem to feel the cold, and wore a perfectly plain-fitting deep crimson ulster, which showed her splendid figure to the greatest advantage, while a felt hat to match completed her most plain, but becoming costume; a long fur bow being about her neck, from which the beautiful, usually pale face looked out, tinted with a most lovely wild rose bloom.

A gentleman came towards Frank with his skates in his hand. It was Sir Jasper Ferndale.

"Hallo, Stanley! Didn't know you were in the neighbourhood. How are you, old man?"

"Right as ninepence, thanks, Ferndale. You're looking quite all there. I have come on a visit to The Towers!"

"Ah! found your cousin there before you. A good fellow is Godfrey Hamilton!"

"So I hear!"

"Oh yes, you'll like him, unless——"

"Unless what? Is there a reservation?"

"Well, it suddenly struck me that that pretty little Lady Marie might be a bone of contention. Hamilton is moon-struck! Wouldn't leave the house for an hour during her illness! I believe, myself, he sleeps on the mat outside her room to get the earliest news of her; and the idea came to me that you used to be sweet in that quarter, in which case you might not like Godfrey, you know!"

"Yes, I am very sweet on Lady Marie, and

always shall be. She is one of the dearest girls; but there is no fear of my being jealous. I don't like her in that way."

"Ah! that's fortunate, for I think Godfrey has made some running. Saving a girl's life always makes a bond of union between people! Don't you think so?"

"I do, indeed!" I should like to save the woman I love, and to feel that her life is really mine!" said Frank, with enthusiasm.

"Well, if she is anywhere over there I think you may have the chance," laughed Sir Jasper, as he nodded towards the lake. "The ice is very thin at present—too thin for the stress they are putting upon it, so I'm off. I like skating, but not well enough to risk my life for it. I'd not complain if I broke my neck in the hunting field—it is worth it. It's my natural element; but to be drowned like a blind kitten—no thank you, it's not good enough. I shall just go in at Bramley's for a 'refresher,' and walk home. Ask Hamilton when he is coming back? He is supposed to be on a visit to me, but as soon as he set eyes on Lady Marie, I found politeness was thrown to the winds, and I had to whistle for my visitor. Ta, ta! I suppose you'll give me a call while you're in this part of the country?"

"Thank you, I'll try. But you don't really think the ice is not safe?"

"I do, indeed! You're fortunate to have no skater, you can't be led into temptation; but if you are bent on suicide, why, I'll lend you mine with pleasure."

Frank laughed heartily.

"If the ice is not safe I should prefer to persuade my friends to come off, if possible."

"If it were possible! but ladies are such wilful things."

"Then I had better accept your skates, I suppose. I should not see much of my friends if I were on the bank, and they were on the ice, should I?" and he held out his hand for them.

"Ah!" laughed the Baronet. "So you are determined to meet your fate, Stanley?"

"My dear fellow, I have met it already."

"But not the sort of fate I mean. But truth to tell, I'd almost as soon meet it one way as the other. I like the ladies at a distance. In fact, I'm a confirmed old bachelor."

"Wait till Miss Right comes athwart your path, old man! You will tell a different tale then."

"Not I. I'm impervious to the fine arts of flattery and flirtation."

"Hush, hush! What would the ladies say to you? I am too fond of the fair sex to listen to such blasphemy! Women are a great deal better than we are. You'll find it out some day."

"Who is the happy she?" said the Baronet wickedly.

"I never said there was one!" answered Frank, with a decided flush.

"No, not exactly, but you have the symptoms. I know them well, so many of my friends have gone off through that epidemic. It's worse than Russian influenza. There is no hope for a fellow if he gets the true sort, it seems. I won't detain you. *Au revoir*," and Sir Jasper Ferndale walked on laughing to himself for other men's love affairs amused him vastly, having none of his own.

CHAPTER XIV.

"SUDDENLY THERE AROSE A TERRIBLE CRY, A CRY OF TERROR FROM MANY VOICES."

FRANK STANLEY stood hesitating upon the bank, his eyes fixed upon the fitting figure of beautiful Geraldine; but, for a time, she did not see him at all.

Perhaps the intensity of his gaze compelled her attention, for she looked up quite suddenly, and their eyes met. Possibly the devotion in Frank's blue orbs enchaind her. Anyway, he was satisfied.

In those wonderful eyes he saw a flash of

pleasure, an undeniable interest, and her mother felt her start.

"What is it, Geraldine?" she questioned.

"Nothing, mamma!" she answered, calmly. "What should it be?"

"You started, darling!"

"Did I? You need never take any notice of me, dear. Mother, there is Mr. Stanley."

It was the mother's turn to be confused.

"What! Sir Godfrey Hamilton's nephew! Where? Has he seen us?"

"Yes; undoubtedly. Mamma, do you not like him? You speak so abruptly."

"My child, I know nothing of him to like or dislike. Remember, I have only seen him once."

"You; but even at first sight one has a feeling whether one could be friends or no. Don't you think so?"

"I believe in instinct, certainly. Come, Geraldine, dear, don't loiter!"

The girl felt a desire to linger near Frank Stanley. Probably, she hoped he would come and speak to her, but she was too proud to own this to her mother.

She had loved once, and had been deserted; she meant in future to guard her heart very carefully.

Frank felt a keen sense of disappointment when the ladies skated away. He forgot all about Sir Jasper's warning, and called a man, who was there for the purpose, to put on his skates; and, once on, he was quickly upon the frozen water, joining his whirl to the rest, following in the wake of the FitzHerberts.

At last, Geraldine's hand was in his own. The glorious, dark eyes were raised to his, and, kind fate, just at that moment up came Mr. Bramley.

"Why, Stanley, is that you? Very glad to see you! Thought I should find you here. Heard the horse was waiting at my stables. How is Lady Marie? She's a rare favourite of mine!" and giving Frank no time to reply, he almost forcibly led Mrs. FitzHerbert away.

"Of course you must come," he laughed. "Miss Geraldine is in good company. Stanley will take care of her. You have no excuse for refusing me."

Then he waited.

"By-the-bye, Stanley, how is Sir Godfrey? Is he at the Towers?"

Mrs. FitzHerbert stopped short. The answer to that question meant much to her.

"No; I am here alone. My uncle is in the North," replied Frank, and the others passed on—Mrs. FitzHerbert with a sigh of relief.

Frank and Geraldine were alone, although they were in a crowd.

"So I have found you at last, Miss FitzHerbert!" he said, as he gazed into the beautiful face, with a smile. "I confess I began to despair of ever seeing you again. Why have you hidden from me?"

"I have not hidden, Mr. Stanley. I have been at the Priory ever since."

"But how could I be aware of that?"

"I don't know, I am sure. You certainly never asked me."

"True! but you were engaged to me for two more dances, you know, and you vanished."

"Yes; mamma was ill; we were obliged to leave."

"Were you glad or sorry?" he asked, his eyes fixed upon her earnestly.

"I was not glad!" she answered, with her characteristic coldness.

He took her hand in the manner of skaters, and drew her on with him.

"You were not glad, Miss FitzHerbert? That leaves room to hope that you regretted going, just a very, very little. For myself, I was truly sorry, and most bitterly disappointed to lose sight of you, and I hope never, never to do so again. Miss FitzHerbert," he added, earnestly, "it may be a small matter to you that we have met again, but to me it is a very great one, believe me."

She looked at him gravely.

"You are an adept at compliments, Mr. Stanley! I never believe in them myself."

"Nor I. I could not speak one to you. Compliments, if spoken at all, must be to those for whom one does not care; to those we love they are realities and no compliments—the outcome of a full heart!"

"Those are my sentiments, I confess," she said, a smile creeping over the fine face.

"I am not surprised at that, Miss FitzHerbert. There is, I am sure, much sympathy between us. Have you forgotten our dancing together?" and he bent low to her.

"No," she admitted, "I do not forget."

"Heaven bless you for those words!" he said, excitedly. "Miss FitzHerbert, do not think me insane for addressing you thus upon so short an acquaintance, but you are a real friend to me. You have so rarely been out of my thoughts since the night of the ball. Shall I tell you a secret? Think me mad if you will, but I learnt to love you then. Learnt, did I say? I loved you by intuition, without any teaching whatever. Do you believe in love at first sight, dear? In the fellowship of souls and the sudden awakening to sympathy?"

She turned a very white face to his.

"I do not believe in love at all," she murmured, in a voice all unlike her own. "Men take fancies which they call love, knowing nothing of the meaning of the sacred word; then they tire of the amusement, and woe, indeed, to the woman who has been weak enough to believe in their honeyed words."

"No, such creatures are not men, they are scoundrels! I am not one of them, believe me. I love you, indeed, and, in truth; nothing could change me, nothing make me love you less. I would live or die for you!"

"I have not the faintest doubt that you think so now, Mr. Stanley," she answered, impatiently; "but I have made up my mind to do without love. I do not believe in it."

"You have made up your mind! Surely that is only a mask to hide a tender heart. If you had no vulnerable spot you would require no armour. I could not be in your presence without telling you the truth. Do not turn from me because I am honest. I do not expect anything from you yet; but, indeed, I can never be happy apart from you. Let me see you as often as ever I can. Let me teach you to love me, my beautiful! Take my word for it, you will in time. You will see how my every thought is centred upon you; and you will be kind, dear, or your face is no index of your mind."

That face had softened. A yearning look was in the great dark eyes.

"If I could but believe," she murmured; "but, no—it is impossible. I cannot."

"Will you not tell me why?"

"If you must hear, know that once I had that faith which now I lack. Is that not enough for you, Mr. Stanley?"

"By Heaven, no! Let me deal with any man who could be unkind to you, sweet one! Let me avenge you. Then have faith once more, for all manhood is not vile because one man is base."

"No, I dare not listen. I have long since made up my mind. I could never be second, and all men love themselves more than they can love anyone else. If we are to be friends, say no more."

"If I am silent as to my feelings, then, I may bask in the sunshine of your presence—unless I can prove to you that you are first—that I love you more than my own life. Would that satisfy you?"

"I should want a great deal of convincing. As to vengeance, no! I leave that to Heaven, with a firm belief that it will repay! And now, see, my mother is signing for me to go to her."

"I pray you to stay a little while—I have so much to say! You have thought nothing of me all this time, but I—you have never been out of my mind! Miss FitzHerbert, be kind to me; let me be your friend till I can persuade you to believe in me?"

She hesitated.

"My faith has been killed!" she replied, quickly. "Still, I think we might be friends, if you asked for nothing more."

"Thank you for even that! Sweetest of friends! That must suffice for the present, but I live in hope!"

"In that case, if you think of visiting us, you must remember our respective positions!" she said, shyly, the damask blood mantling her cheeks, "and must not be so demonstrative. What would my mother think if she could hear you?"

"She would think I love you as I do; but I will be careful, if only you will be kind!"

"Geraldine!" said Mrs. FitzHerbert, skating towards her, "did you not see that I called you, my dear? Bid Mr. Stanley goodbye. Lord Northby is waiting for you. You promised to skate with him some time since—then we are going home," and with a bow to Frank passed on.

"I must go!" murmured the girl. "Good-bye, Mr. Stanley!" and she held out her well-gloved hand to him.

"Miss FitzHerbert," he said, "why does your mother avoid me? Does she dislike me?"

"I do not know. I have not heard her say so. I hope she does not."

"Heaven bless you again for those kind words! Then, farewell for the present! Will you echo that?"

"Farewell for the present!" she repeated, softly.

Her eyes once more gave out that wonderful light. Their hands parted, and Geraldine had left him.

He stood watching the lithe form with a full heart until he saw her hand in hand with Lord Northby, as she had been with him.

At that sight his brain felt to be on fire. Was this that frenzied passion—jealousy? he wondered.

He could not tell—he had never loved before. All he knew was that he had the strongest desire to throttle his lordship at that moment!

He turned away. The serpent had entered his Eden. He did not want to see Geraldine with Lord Northby.

With this thought he went to the bank, and took off his skates, meaning to depart, when suddenly there arose a terrible cry—a cry of terror from many voices.

He started to his feet.

There was a dreadful scene of confusion going on.

Sir Jasper Ferndale had been right—the lake was not sufficiently frozen to be safe, and now it had broken in with a sudden crash.

Frank Stanley looked wildly around. Geraldine FitzHerbert and Lord Northby were nowhere to be seen. They were items of the struggling mass of humanity fighting for dear life in the great black hole where the ice had been.

Sir Jasper's skates were lying upon the bank, and in another moment Frank's coats were on the top of them; his hat and gloves were flung upon the heap, his Oxford shoes were kicked off, and he was passing over the broken ice at a rapid pace.

He saw one thing, only one—a white, beautiful face, and he knew that the dark eyes met his.

He saw Mr. Bramley.

"Bramley!" he cried. "A rope, for the love of Heaven! The ice is rotten! See how it breaks away as those unfortunates cling to it!"

There was a moment of breathless silence as Frank stood ready.

A great splash followed as he sprang into the water, and a cheer rang out into the heavens, making echoes in the black, leafless beeches. But the face which he had seen had sunk beneath the steel-hued water.

A bitter cry broke from the brave man's lips, for that face belonged to the woman he loved!

It was only the work of a moment to dive after her; and before long he rose to the surface with Geraldine in his arms, but the difficulties were not yet over. The water was icy cold, and both he and girl were shivering painfully.

Geraldine was conscious and quiet. Her great dark eyes met his full of confidence. He was holding her in his arms, and treading the water with his feet. They found the ice too rotten to land, and were waiting for the rope.

"Mr. Stanley," she murmured faintly, and he bent to catch her words. "You have proved to me that I am first, and that you thought of my good before your own. I thank you from my heart. You have restored my belief in human nature."

He pressed her closely to his breast, but, lover though he was, he fully realized the fact that when lives were in danger was no time for lovemaking—and he gave a joyful cry as he sighted the rope!

CHAPTER XV.

THE WORK OF RESCUE.

THE rope was flung to Frank, and by its aid he managed to get Geraldine out of the water, and safely to the shore. The girl gave one hasty glance around.

"My mother!" she gasped. "Oh! Mr. Stanley, where is she?"

His eyes wandered all about the banks. The ice was deserted, save by those who were doing the good work of rescue. Nowhere was she to be seen.

Miss FitzHerbert laid her hand upon his arm.

"Mr. Stanley, only find, only save my mother, and ask what you will of me, I will grant it! She and I have been so very much to one another. She has been my all! I could not lose her."

"You shall not, if I can help it," he answered bravely. "I will do my best, for no reward. Geraldine, I want you to love me for myself, not for any service I may render you. I could accept no sacrifice from you, dear. If ever you can lay your hand in mine, and say 'Frank, I love you,' it will be the brightest and best day of my life. Till then I am your friend and servant; but, Geraldine, the time will come."

He pressed the fingers which lay upon his arm, and was gone.

She looked after him with anxious eyes, a deep respect for him springing up within her heart. If only she had met him before that other! If only her faith had not been broken, and her nature changed! Then came the question, what was this warm glow about her heart, which had been a stranger to it so long?

Was she really changed, or had she acted a part to deceive herself? Her whole soul was yearning for something—what was it?

A great wave of feeling swept over her. If only she had never loved Cyril De Laey! Then she turned impatiently from herself. How could she be thinking at all upon such a subject when her mother's fate was hanging in the balance?

Where was she now?

It was the question which Frank was trying to solve. A score of people were swarming around Geraldine with their meaningless congratulations, but she heeded none of them; her gaze followed Frank wherever he went. His whole mind had been set upon saving her; he had not once thought of Mrs. FitzHerbert. But now he was making eager inquiries concerning her, and he ascertained that she had been skating in the opposite direction when the accident occurred, where she was immersed. It seemed that she had been clinging for a time to a tree branch overhanging the water, and had only then fallen in from exhaustion.

Some of the far which Mrs. FitzHerbert

had worn was torn, and attached to the bough, thus clearly indicating her position. But she was then nowhere to be seen.

Mr. Bramley had followed Frank, and was looking on with interest. Mrs. FitzHerbert was a real friend of his, and his face was grave with sad anticipation.

"What is the bottom here, do you know?" asked Frank.

"Mud!" was the laconic answer.

"Then give me the rope, Mr. Bramley, and if I stick in it, haul me up. I should not care to end my days like a fly on a catch-'em-alive-o paper!" and he tied the rope about his waist as he spoke, and dived into the icy water.

After groping about at the bottom for some time, and rising to the surface more than once for air, Frank Stanley found Geraldine's mother—insensible, and well nigh smothered in the mud.

After considerable labour, which was not easy under water, he succeeded in dragging her out from the sticky loam into which she had sunk deeply, and towed himself with his heavy burthen to land, where, with Mr. Bramley's help, he was able to get Mrs. FitzHerbert on to the bank, where her daughter's loving hands received the inanimate form.

There was no sign of the frigid "Ice Queen," as Geraldine knelt beside her prostrate mother, kissing the cold hands and face; and Frank smiled at the change.

The girl had been ice-bound, frozen by some chilling sorrow, but, as he had believed, the young heart beneath the crust of the snow was warm and true.

"Oh! Mr. Stanley," she murmured, "tell me that she is not dead!" looking up at him with beseeching eyes.

He let his fingers rest on Mrs. FitzHerbert's wrist.

"Be happy, your mother lives!" he said. "I wish to Heaven I had my flask. I believe a man should always carry brandy."

"Whiskey would answer all the purpose, I think!" replied the parson, producing a flask from his pocket. "If so, it is quite at your service, Miss FitzHerbert."

Geraldine took it eagerly, and began to put a few drops between her mother's lips.

"Mr. Bramley," said Frank, as he looked at the knot of people gathered around. "I am sure some of these ladies will be glad to assist Miss FitzHerbert in restoring her mother. There is more work for us men to do."

"All right, I am ready," answered the parson. "I'll do the hauling up if you will take to the water. I am not so young as you are, and know what rheumatism means."

Geraldine raised a pair of very sad eyes to Frank's face.

"Oh! Have you not done your share, Mr. Stanley? You may lose your own life if you remain in the water too long. Do not go!" and she held out her hand to him.

He took it and held it in a firm, warm clasp, his eyes meeting hers bright and fearless.

"Look over there, Miss Geraldine!" and he glanced at the dark hole in the distance, where half-drowned women were clinging wildly to the broken edges of the ice.

Her eyes followed his, and she shuddered.

"Can you wish me not to go now?" he asked, in a low voice. "Would you not despise me if I loitered here doing woman's work, when I might be saving life? Do not bid me stay, dear! I cannot. Send some one to fetch your carriage, and get your mother home as soon as possible. She should have the doctor, too, as quickly as you can secure his services."

She clung to him.

"Promise to come to the Priory when you leave here, that I may know that you are safe."

"I promise; and thank you for your interest."

"Go, then!" she said, earnestly, with that wonderful look in her eyes once more. "And Heaven protect you, Frank!"

He went, his heart in a tremble of excitement, for Geraldine had called him by his

Christian name, and had bade Heaven protect him.

He felt the strength of a young giant, as he returned to the work of rescue. Several gentlemen had joined in it.

Not only does one fool make many, but one brave man creates many. Others are ashamed to be onlookers when even one buckles to work. Many hands make light labour; and numbers had to thank Frank Stanley and his helpers that afternoon for their lives.

When the last person was rescued from the water; two were past recovery, and the body of one had not been found, while forty had been saved in all.

"There will be a Humane Society's medal for you, Stanley," said Mr. Bramley, heartily as he slapped him upon the back, "and well you deserve it! What puzzles me is, how you have gone through all this fatigue? It has been enough to kill a horse or drown a cat! You young fellows have the pull of us older ones in your powers of endurance. Now, come home, and get into some of my dry clothes. My semi-clerical cut won't be quite so smart as your own; but, notwithstanding that fact, they may save you from rheumatic fever, so you will be wise, and not refuse a rig out. And you must have something to eat before you attempt to drive to the Towers. In your case, I should go straight to bed; and if you agree with me, why, I'll put you up with the greatest pleasure."

"I think I ought to return. Lady Marie is still far from well, and some garbled story might reach her."

"Ah!" laughed the parson. "So tender as that, is it? Well, one must not judge by appearances. Truth to tell, I thought the young lady of your fancy was nearer here, from what I saw this afternoon!"

"The tenderness is only that of friendship, I can assure you. Lady Marie is good to all!"

"That is true. If you should change your mind about staying when you have been to the Priory (I admit I heard you promise, although I suppose I was not intended to do so), stay by all manner of means. I shall be very pleased to have you, and the Earl's groom can take a note. No hurry to decide at all!"

So the two men walked to the Parsonage together, and Frank looked handsome even in the too-loose garments of Mr. Bramley, who would not allow him to move out of the house again until he had eaten a substantial meal, and drank a strong mixing of "hot with."

Thus inwardly armed, Mr. Stanley walked to the Priory, where the Rector promised to follow him in half-an-hour, with a merry twinkle in his eye.

"I should think they won't take longer than that to settle the matter," he laughed to himself, as the other went briskly away.

Mrs. FitzHerbert's grave butler had been run a little out of his usual groove by surprise at the events of the afternoon, and when he saw Frank again he addressed him eagerly.

"It's a mercy that I told you where to find the ladies, sir!" he said, "or this would have been a bad case indeed. You are to be shown into the drawing-room, if you please, and Miss FitzHerbert will come to you. She is upstairs with the doctor now, and he placed a comfortable easy chair for him before the fire."

But Frank was too excited to sit down. He stood looking at the fire-flames reflectively until the door opened, and Geraldine stood before him with outstretched hands.

"How can I ever thank you, Mr. Stanley? You have done so very much for me!"

"I need no thanks whatever, dear. Let me be your friend, as you promised this afternoon, until you learn to love me. It will be a delightful task to teach you that lesson. Then I shall envy no man alive."

"Frank, you do really want me? You do truly love me?" She asked, with glowing

cheeks, and the look he knew deepening in her lovely eyes.

"Need you ask me? Geraldine, my love, I gain or lose all when I gain or lose you!"

"Very well. I promised. You saved my mother. I am yours!"

"My darling, you tempt me," he murmured, passionately; "but no, Geraldine, you cannot say you love me yet, can you?"

"I admire, I respect you," she faltered. "I have never met a man so noble—so good. I can trust you, if you will; but before you engage yourself to me I should have to tax your faith!"

"It would not fail you, dear girl. Of that you may be sure; but do not trouble to tell me anything now."

"Perhaps you would not care to wed me after all, Frank. I must tell you the truth. I was engaged in India, and the man I was to have married broke with me because he learnt what I must tell you."

"My child, he must have been a black-hearted villain. He need only have looked into your pure, proud face to feel sure that your love would crown his life, and make him a happy man. Geraldine, I long for that time, but it cannot be till your love is mine. When those dear arms can twine about my neck, and those dear lips confess their love for me, then, sweetheart, let me give you my name, and the devotion which is yours. You cannot say it yet, can you, darling?"

"I hardly know," she faltered; "but you are growing, have grown, very dear to me!"

"You would know if the love had come. It would overspread your heart and soul like summer sunshine, as it has done mine. I am content to wait, Geraldine, since I have hope. What you now feel is only gratitude at present."

"If pity is akin to love," she said, softly, "surely gratitude is a near relation too, dear? I only know how glad I am to have you near me now. For the rest, be the judge. I will follow where you lead. Only, Frank, may I ask a favour?"

"A dozen, *mignonne*!"

"Then do not leave me while my poor mother is so ill!"

"How selfish I am not to have asked for her."

"Selfish! When you risked your life for hers and mine! Frank, how can you do yourself such an injustice?"

"Well, how is Mrs. FitzHerbert, dear?"

The girl's lips trembled, the beautiful eyes filled with tears.

"The doctor will not say, and that makes me afraid."

"Take comfort, dear. People are often very ill after a long immersion. Your mother will soon be better."

"Indeed, I hope so! But, Frank, you will not go far away. I have no one to lean on but you!"

He smiled at her.

"Very well. I will not go farther than Mr. Bramley's. He has invited me to stay there. I had said no; but if I can be of any comfort to you I will stay. You can see me at any time by sending for me, dear!"

"That is kind of you! Will your friends at The Towers mind?"

"No, Geraldine; it was Lady Marie who sent for me to give me your address."

"And did she know?" she asked.

He understood her.

"Yes, dear! She knows I love you dearly."

"Frank!" said the girl, "I thought I felt sure that she loved you! Are you certain that she does not?"

"Quite, quite sure. Can you keep a secret, pet?"

"Try me!"

"Well, she loves some one else, and told me so herself!"

Thus Frank spoke confidently, and meant to speak the truth.

(To be continued)

TWO PARTIES.

—O—

"You're home early to-night, aren't you, Bessie?" said Annie Best.

Bessie stood there in the level light of the setting sun like a tall, straight silhouette. Her luxuriant reddish-brown hair made a Titian-like mist against the ruddy glow; her hazel eyes shone like stars. She flung her basket on the table.

"Yes," said she. "And I've raged like an evil spirit all the way from the warehouse."

"Bessie!"

The staid, middle-aged elder sister spoke the monosyllable in accents of reproof.

"I have! There's Nannie Grant has sent out all the invitations to her grand party in the Square, and never asked me!"

"You couldn't expect it, Bessie."

"And why couldn't I expect it? Didn't I invite her to my strawberry tea last June under the old apple-tree? and to my birthday charades?"

"Oh, yes, but your little festivities scarcely count!"

"Of course they count. Why shouldn't they? They're the very best I could give—and she solemnly promised when I made room for her in the closing charade to ask me to the first party she had. And this—this is the way she keeps her promise?"

"Don't 'rage' any more, Bessie, dear!" soothed the elder sister, stroking her hand.

"No, I won't if I can help it. But I did want to go to the party—and I took it for granted that I should be asked, and I bought the new pink challie dress and had it made up, and—and—"

The brown eyes were swimming in tears now—the full red lower lip quivered.

"I know," said Annie, gently. "But Nannie Grant has altered strangely since Desmond Brooke began paying attention to her. It seems as if her head were turned at the prospect of marrying a rich, attractive man like that, whose lineage goes back to Bosworth, and whose manners are so charming."

"She had no business to leave me out, for all that," protested Bessie.

"You are only a working-bee, child. You have not part or lot with life's butterflies."

"I do work for a living, and I'm not ashamed of it," retorted Bessie. "Neither was she ashamed to come to my little gatherings. And this is the way in which I am repaid."

And she rushed out of the room and consoled herself with a good cry.

The next day she came dancing home from her daily working life in high spirits.

"Annie," she cried, to the elder sister, who was so like a mother to her, "I've concocted such a splendid plan!"

"A plan, dear?"

"We girls at the warehouse have determined to avenge ourselves. Mr. Grey says we may have the big packing-room at the top of the building, and he'll have it decorated, and the floor all waxed for us, and the packer can play the violin, and the foreman of the piano works will lend us a piano for one night for a mere song, and we are going to write the invitations, and we'll have a party too. We'll see whether the aristocracy of the Court will have all the fun to itself. Each girl is to make a loaf of cake, and I'm to prepare a bushel of mottos at the very least, I've got the pretty coloured fringe paper here in my pocket, and the verses, and Alice Kemp is to supply lemonade, and we'll have such a lark!"

Annie smiled. "It's a bold undertaking," said she. "Whom are you going to invite?"

"Why, everybody! And let them take their choice between Ellsworth elegance and work-room fun. Do help me with the mottos, Annie. The invitations are being written, and every one must be in the post-office by nine o'clock to-night. There's not a second to lose."

Kind Annie sat down to help fold the sweets

in the blue and pink and yellow tissue paper. There were times when she caught the spirit of Bessie's youth and vivacity, and felt herself almost young again. How pretty the girl looked with her eyes sparkling, her wonderful auburn hair catching the lamplight in bars of gold, her cheeks glowing like a rare ripe peach, she thought. Why should not her future be as brilliant as that of the girl in Armleigh Square?

For two days before the much-longed-for evening, a delicious snowstorm spread its white, breezy wings over the land.

All the world wore its regalia mantle of pearl, and when at last the full moon burst through the clouds and shone radiantly down on the warehouse roof, it was fairly out-faced by the row of red lights in the upper windows.

"Going to the workroom ball?" said Desmond Burke, as he pinned a cluster of white pinks on the lapel of his coat.

"Of course I'm going! Do you think I could resist such a piquant little appeal as this dainty little ticket? Besides, the girls are quite different from ordinary work girls. I know one, who is a rector's sister, and another who reads Greek, and Miss Smith, the head of the committee, will receive you with the dignity of a queen!"

Sir John Symonds, a guest of Burke's, who had unexpectedly arrived on the previous day, opened his eyes.

"All right, old fellow," said he. "If you say it's the thing, the thing it is. But didn't I hear something about a party in Armleigh Square for the same evening?"

Burke nodded carelessly.

"Yes," said he. "*An embarras de riches*! But I think by starting early we'll manage to do them both. We'll take the workroom festivity first, and mind, Symonds, you're on your mettle. You've no idea what bright, pretty girls they are!"

"I haven't a doubt it will be awfully jolly," said the Baronet, drawing on his primrose kids.

"I don't want to startle the dove-cote," laughed Burke, "so I shall call you plain 'Mr. Symonds.'"

"Do," said Sir John. "And you can say I've come on account of the far business. It's true enough. I am on the look out for far—of a sort."

The big packing-room was all alight and alive. One of the girls was playing the "Lancers" on the piano, accompanied by the packers' spirited violin *obligato*. The floor was already covered with dancers.

Bessie Best, supported by her bright-eyed "committee," stood by the door receiving her guests in the pink challie dress, with a cluster of red azaleas in her corsage, and her grandmother's real Chantilly lace scarf draped, Spanish fashion, across one shoulder and under the other.

Sir John Symonds lost his heart at once.

"By Jove! what a beauty!" he thought; and ten minutes later, when he was doing the "grand chain" with Miss Best, with Desmond Burke and a cherry-checked brunette opposite, he could have sworn that he was walking on air!

"Twelve o'clock! Well, what of that?" he cried, impatiently, when Burke held up his watch before a pair of most unwilling eyes. "You don't expect me to leave this place, do you? I say, old fellow, let's drop the other thing. Tell them we're ill—tell them the trap tipped over—tell them what you please, only let me alone!"

Burke laughed.

"I don't blame you, Symonds," said he; "But I'm in honour bound to show up in the Square. I'll go on there, and call for you on my way back."

But he gave Bessie's hand a long and lingering pressure as he parted from her.

"Pray give Miss Grant my compliments," said Bessie, lightly. "and tell her, if you can, that you and Mr. Symonds have really enjoyed yourselves here."

Nannie Grant's party had fallen flat. All the dowagers and elderly people had come, but there was a woful dearth of the younger element.

Not more than one set stood up to dance; the young men leaned listlessly against the doorways, and the girls yawned behind their fans, and wondered when the "fun" was going to commence.

It was past midnight when Mr. Burke entered.

"How late you are!" cried Nannie, full of secret wrath at his defection.

"I am so sorry," said Burke, with courteous formality, "but there is another merry-making going on to-night—Miss Bessie Best's dance—in the upper story of the warehouse. I have just come from there. She sent her compliments to you. Everyone is there, and I've enjoyed myself exceedingly."

Nannie turned very red and bit her lip.

"Indeed?" said she. "Where is Sir John? I heard he arrived at your house yesterday."

"Oh," said Burke, unpleasantly truthful, "I left him at the warehouse; I couldn't induce him to come away."

Miss Grant tossed her head.

"I'm afraid there will be no more dancing to-night," said she. "People don't seem to care for it. There, they're announcing supper! Will you take Miss Jones in?"

"With pleasure, but"—another unwelcome disclosure—"I've just had supper at the other place. Just cake and lemonade; but I don't know when anything has tasted so good to me."

Dora Grant gave her sister a meaning glance as she helped her to arrange the couples going in to supper.

"There!" said she. *I told you you ought to ask that girl. See how she's paid you out for neglecting her!*

Nannie shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "I don't care!" said she.

But she *did* care—very much indeed. Somehow, it was borne in upon her that she had made her life-mistake in that night's calculations.

They breakfasted rather late at the Burke mansion the next morning—Desmond and the young baronet.

"After this," said Sir John, enthusiastically, "I shall always have the utmost admiration for working girls. And that lovely, golden-haired Miss Best—she's like a princess in disguise. I say, Burke, what would you think if I laid siege to her and took her back with me as Lady Symonds?"

"You won't do that!" said Burke.

"Won't I? And why not?"

"Because she has a previous engagement. I asked her last night to be my wife, and she consented."

"I lower my colours at once," said Sir John, leaning across the table to shake hands with his host, "and I congratulate you, old fellow, most heartily!"—while, in the yellow glow of the winter's morning, at home Bessie was whispering her happiness to sympathetic Annie.

"And," she murmured, "I owe it all to the workroom!"

A CRUEL SILENCE.

—O—

CHAPTER IX

It was three o'clock when Harold presented himself at the office in Pumpcourt. The clerk who admitted him and recognized him at once made no difficulty about his seeing Mr. Duncan; and Lord Keith felt thankful that the senior partner was disengaged, for in his state of feverish excitement it would have been simple torture for him to have had to wait in the well-known familiar office.

Andrew Duncan was about the age of Lord Rosemoor, and, like him, the father of an only son; but fate had not been kind to the lawyer.

His boy would never be a source of pride and satisfaction to him. In spite of the greatest advantages, the most careful training, the youth had turned out badly. He was a black sheep before he left school; and now—well the Duncan's best friends knew it was the truest kindness never to mention Jim's name.

Harold was about his age, and had been at school with him. Perhaps this was why the lawyer took more interest in Lord Keith than in any other client. He had for the young Viscount something more than friendship, and yet his brow was clouded when Harold was ushered into his presence, and his greeting had in it more of reluctance than pleasure.

"Why, Mr. Duncan," said Lord Keith, speaking lightly, because he would fain hide the tumult at his heart, "one would say you were vexed to see me!"

"I believe I am!" returned the lawyer, bluntly. "Do you know, the moment I came upon that letter yesterday I felt there was trouble in store. It was a thousand pities you did not take my advice three years ago, and let me get your neck out of that noose."

Harold sighed.

"I begin to think you were right, after all!" he said, reluctantly. "But you see my father is a terribly proud man, and I feared the exposure would break his heart. Then while poor Keith was alive, the consequences of my mistake only affected myself!"

"You won't be able to keep the secret much longer," said Mr. Duncan, thoughtfully. "Whenever I see Lord Rosemoor, he bemoans your refusal to think of matrimony. Depend upon it, very soon he may suspect the truth—or something like it."

Harold drew his chair a little nearer his adviser.

"Do you know before I had it—the letter you sent on—I had made up my mind to come here, and ask you to undertake the case—to put the whole business in your hands, and ask you to free me—if you could!"

Mr. Duncan looked up quickly.

"It's too late!" he said, gravely. "Three years ago I could have got you of the mess, I think, but now it is too late."

"Too late! Surely you can't guess the contents of that letter?"

"I never guess anything. Lord Keith. A lawyer deals only with facts. Let me just run over the case, and see how it stands."

Keith winced. It was clear the "case," however it stood, was full of pain for him.

"Three years ago," resumed the lawyer, "when just of age you had a passion for the stage and all things theatrical. This threw you into the company of many people far beneath you in the social scale, among others of a Mrs. Clements, a widow with two daughters!"

Lord Keith nodded.

"Out it as short as you can!" he said, sadly. "Heaven knows I have forgotten nothing!"

"You actually accepted an engagement to join a travelling company as first tragedian (it seems wonderful you should have had such gloomy tastes at twenty-one). The Clements' family were also of the party. Whilst visiting a remote Scotch town you all went on a picnic. You and the elder of the Miss Clements became separated from the rest of the party, lost your way, and found yourselves at nightfall in a village where you were quite unknown. You could only obtain shelter at the inn by describing the young lady as your wife!"

"The next morning, before you could set off to return to your respective abodes, Mrs. Clements descended on you with a low, coarse sort of man whom she described as her brother-in-law, and who proved to be a lawyer who had just escaped being struck off the rolls. He threatened you with an action for the wilful carrying off of his niece from her mother's control, and then declared by Scotch law she was your wife, since you had already described her as such. You, acting like (forgive me for saying it) an idiot, let this

man ride roughshod over you, and actually accepted the position!"

Harold flashed uneasily.

"What else could I do? I never had one spark of love for her, but I did believe then that she was an innocent girl, who had been equally ignorant with myself of the Scotch marriage law!"

"And she turned out to be ten years your senior, and the heroine of one or two breach of promise suits; besides, the whole affair being pre-arranged, even to the settling with her dear mamma which inn the widow would find you at when she came to pay her visit of indignation. The whole thing was a deep-laid trap, and you walked into it with the innocence of a baby!"

"Granted," said Keith, bitterly. "But, Mr. Duncan, why revive the past? I am now resolved to accept the good offices you formerly proffered. I am told that she"—here he hesitated as though the words hurt him—"my wife, has set me free. If I find it a ruse I mean to appeal to the law."

The solicitor shook his head.

"The law can't help you now. If you had only let me bring an action for conspiracy against the mother and uncle, we could have proved the whole thing was pre-arranged, and your marriage would have been set aside easily. But whatever fraud there was the law would hold you had condoned since. For more than three years you have been content to take no steps in the matter, and even to make Lady Keith an allowance as your wife."

"Don't call her that!"

"Unfortunately, it is her title."

"She never heard of my brother's death. She never knew my real name. And now I want you to read this, and to give me your genuine opinion."

Mr. Duncan took the letter, and read the lines slowly and thoughtfully.

"Go to the old place at Camberwell. Freedom awaits you!"

"I should say it was a blind."

Keith started.

"What could be her aim? What could she gain now by deceiving me?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"I fail to see. But the whole family have shown themselves such skilful women of business I am convinced the letter is written with some object in view."

"It is very plainly worded. 'Freedom awaits you!' What could that mean?"

"That Lady Keith was dying (which is improbable, for women who are so terribly in the way usually reach ninety), that she had been married to someone else before that unfortunate picnic, and so had never been your wife; or that she had eloped with a new admirer, and so left the field for a divorce open to you. But, Lord Keith, from all you have told me of this woman I don't believe in one of these suppositions. This letter is a blind to lure you to Camberwell on some sinister purpose."

"They couldn't murder me in broad daylight!" persisted Harold. "Besides, that would be like killing the goose with the golden eggs, since, if once I were dead, Augusta's allowance would cease."

"May I speak freely?"

"I wish you would."

"Then I believe that your wife has seen you in London, and discovered that the strolling actor 'Mr. Harold' is really Viscount Keith, Lord Rosemoor's son and heir. At this distance of time she might find it difficult to trace any of the people who knew of the Scotch marriage, and could identify you as 'Mr. Harold.' But if you go to her at Camberwell, and acknowledge you are her husband, it will be easy enough for her to get witnesses to prove your visit. Then her next move would be to go to the Abbey, and carry her story to Lord Rosemoor."

"I believe you are right."

"Then you won't go to Camberwell?"

"I must. Duncan, for pity sake, don't say 'I told you so.' For pity sake, don't cast my

folly in my teeth. When you urged me, at any risk of exposure, to try for a legal release from this horrid entanglement, your strongest argument was that one day I might long for a home and a wife of whom I was not ashamed."

"I have feared, ever since I heard of your brother's death, that you would regret your choice," said Mr. Duncan, warmly. "I can imagine no position more painful than yours. You are constantly urged to marry. Your duty to your father, to your name, almost demands it, and yet you are bound by secret fetters. You cannot take a wife."

"It is worse than that."

"How can it be?"

Harold's voice faltered.

"Only that I have found my ideal—only that in an English village there is a girl I love, and who loves me back again. Duncan, if it takes every penny of my fortune, present and to come, if it well-nigh ruins my prospects, help me—to be free!"

The elder man paced the room for a few moments in anxious thought. Suddenly he stopped in front of Lord Keith.

"Does she know?" he asked, abruptly.

"Who?"

"She whom you love. Has she any idea of the terrible barrier between you?"

"She!" Lord Keith opened his eyes in indignant denial. "She is as pure and innocent as a child. I don't suppose she even knows there are such women as—as my wife. She has lived all her life in a little country village, and she knows nothing of the world and its wickedness. She had never left her aunt's cottage until she came to be the guest of my sister's mother-in-law, Lady Tregarthan."

"Then you met her at Dalbury?"

"Ay. We were both staying with the Tregarthans. There was a fire, and—they say—I saved her life. We have been thrown constantly together, and I never guessed where I was letting my heart wander, until my mother wrote to ask when I was coming home. I knew then that no place could be like home to me without my darling."

"And you told her so?"

Harold hesitated.

"You had so often said but for my own sorceries you could set me free; and you know, Duncan, fettered as I am, I have never felt like a married man. I have never even seen Augusta since that awful day when they told me she was my wife!"

Poor Mr. Duncan! But he had wonderful patience with his young friend.

"Lord Keith, that I could have set you free I am positive; but, remember, three years have passed, and your silence during them will be terrible weapon against us. I am afraid. I know it sounds cruel, but truth is best. I am afraid there is no hope unless we can prove that she—Lady Keith—was married before your irregular marriage in Scotland."

Harold groaned.

"How shall I tell Ivy?"

"Have you spoken to her?" asked the lawyer for the third time. "Does she think herself engaged to you?"

"I told her there was a shadow between us, and that until it was removed I dared not ask her aunts for her hand. I told her that until this difficulty was vanquished we could not be openly engaged, but that in the sight of Heaven she was my promised wife."

"And she?"

"She promised to wait for me even if it was months and years."

A dead silence fell on the two men. Poor Keith shaded his face with one hand. He was feeling the bitterness of despair.

Andrew Duncan felt a deep pity for him. It was such a cruel blow; for, to the lawyer's keen judgment, it seemed that the poor little girl who loved his client would have to "wait" until her hair was lined with silver and her face with furrows.

"Why don't you speak?" cried Harold, passionately. "Can't you say something? Your silence drives me mad. Do you mean

that you can do nothing to help us—that we must part?"

"I fear so!"

"There must be some way of escape," cried Harold. "Surely that day's folly must not wreck my whole life—mine and another's!"

"You said that she was very young," said Mr. Duncan, gravely. "We can only hope that in time she may forget you."

"Forget me! Ivy forget me! I cannot hope for that!" said the young man, bitterly. "Besides, you don't know her. She is going back to her aunts to-morrow—two crabbed old maids, who look on the child as a burden to them, and make her days a misery. No, Mr. Duncan, hers is a faithful heart. She won't forget the man who saved her life."

"It would be better for her if she could," said the older man, sadly. "Oh! Lord Keith, why couldn't you keep silent and, at least spare her?"

"Because I believed I had only to make up my mind to the shame of the exposure, and you would be able to set me free; besides, I am not so cautious as you are. I believed in this letter."

Mr. Duncan took it up again.

"The old place at Camberwell!" he said, musingly. "Is that where we have forwarded her allowance?"

"Probably. Woodbine Villa, Coldharbour Lane. It is where they lived when I first knew them."

"And you have been to the house?"

"I have walked home with them once or twice. I don't suppose I have been in the house three times in my life."

"Ah!"

"What do you advise me to do?"

"I hardly know. I am afraid you would not care to wait until quarter day?"

"How would that help me?"

"That after this letter I should certainly not forward the usual cheque, and then the chances are I should receive some communication from 'Mrs. Harold.'"

"I don't think I could stand the suspense!"

"I was afraid not."

"I should like to go there to-night!"

"Well, if you won't wait, perhaps it would be better than waiting. You see, there has been already some little delay. I daresay after first sending this letter 'Mrs. Harold' and her mother sat in great state in their best parlour waiting for you, with their story all dressed up ready. But they'd soon get tired of that."

"Then you think I might go to-night?"

Mr. Duncan glanced at his watch.

"If you'll wait ten minutes, while I write a letter. I will go with you."

"You!"

"You ought to have a witness of what passes, in my opinion," said the lawyer, dryly; "and, as I am behind the scenes already, perhaps I should do better than a stranger. And mind one thing, Lord Keith, don't let them suspect there has come any startling change in your circumstances."

Keith spoke his thanks warmly. He was quite conscious he ought not to go to Woodbine Villa alone, and he knew he could not have a shrewder companion than Mr. Duncan.

They took a cab to Camberwell, and for the whole length of the journey neither of them spoke, only the lawyer stopped the driver abruptly as they reached the beginning of Denmark Hill.

"We'll get out here, please." Then, as Keith looked at him for an explanation, "There are one or two things I want to ask you, and we can talk better walking."

He would not own it to his client, but he was far from hopeful respecting the letter received. To his mind it meant mischief.

Augusta Clements, alias "Mrs. Harold," had been quite content to dispense with the society of the husband she had unjustly captured on condition of two hundred a-year being paid quarterly to enliven her solitude.

Mr. Duncan knew that for three years she

had never attempted any communication with him, and he believed she had written now solely because she had discovered his true rank.

She meant to lure him to Camberwell, and there make her own terms—either public recognition as Lady Keith, or an increased allowance.

Of course it had been foolish of Keith not to cut the bonds that bound him three years ago; but there was something very chivalrous in the young man's refusal to let his own folly cast a slur on the name of which his father was so proud.

He had been very young then, and had thought it easy to lead a lonely, loveless life. No one could blame him too harshly for his mistake.

Looking at it any way it seemed to the lawyer a bad business. Had Lord Rosemoor's elder son lived things would have been easier. Then if Harold were, indeed, set upon marrying his child-love he might have emigrated to America, and after qualifying himself as a citizen of the United States, have been formally divorced—but now the case was widely different. As his father's heir he was bound to England.

The very fact of his rank made it more difficult to hide his terrible mistake.

Marry again? Of course he could not; that was plain enough. The question was, could he go on concealing his most undesirable first union.

"What did you want to know?" asked Harold, as they turned into Coldharbour Lane.

"Only this. What are the means of the family? Have they anything to depend on besides your allowance?"

"The mother had a little pension; her husband had some post in a city house. I fancy he was above her in education. Anyway, he saved enough to buy Woodbine Cottage, and she has that rent free. The brother-in-law, Mr. Mathews, is a shady sort of lawyer, but I fancy he has money. His wife and Mrs. Clements were sisters."

"Two hundred and eighty a-year, and living rent free!" said Mr. Duncan, musingly. "They would be able to afford a little society!"

"The second daughter is married now, I suppose. There was rather a decent sort of fellow in the company hanging after her. His real name was Higgins."

"Ah!"

Woodbine Cottage was an old-fashioned house, standing in a small garden. The beds were bright with flowers, and the gravel paths well kept and free from weeds.

The dazzling whiteness of the blinds, the brightness of the brass knocker, and all the little signs of careful attention about the place impressed the lawyer more favourably, because he was quite unprepared for them.

The maid who answered the door had cherry-coloured ribbons in her cap, and looked a very respectable girl.

"Can I see Mrs. Harold?" said Keith, hesitating just a little as he spoke the name.

"No, sir," returned the maid. "There's been a number of people calling to see Mrs. Harold, but she's not here. She went away in March; and her mother let the house to us for six months, furnished."

The "us" rather amused Mr. Duncan. Evidently the little maid regarded herself as one of the family.

"I have written to Mrs. Harold since March, and I sent my letter here?" he suggested.

"Missis takes in all the letters," said the girl, civilly. "Mrs. Clements asked her to, because they were moving about so. Once a month, or so, she sends an address, and then we post off all the letters and the rent as well. Maybe you'd like to see missis?"

They were ushered into the front sitting-room, and a very cheerful young matron received them.

Both men felt instinctively she was a lady;

and both had sufficient of class-prejudices to take to her more readily on that account.

"Mrs. Clements is moving about continually for her daughter's health. She wrote to me about ten days ago, saying they were going to Bournemouth. I expect they are still there."

"Will you excuse the question?" asked Mr. Duncan. "But did Mrs. Clements enclose a letter, and ask you to post it?"

Mrs. Gresham smiled. "I don't know how you guessed it, but she did. It was directed to H. K., at some London office. She said she had been answering an advertisement, and she fancied letters with country postmarks were overlooked, so she should be much obliged if I would have it posted here. I sent Betsy across to the pillar box with it at once."

"Will you kindly give us the Bournemouth address?" asked Harold.

Mrs. Gresham hesitated. "I should be sorry to get her into any trouble!" she said, simply. "I have reason to know she is a good deal in debt—in fact, we have had a great deal of discomfort from the frequent calls of her creditors. But she is a widow, and in great anxiety, so that I should be loth to get her into fresh distress."

"I assure you we are not creditors," said Mr. Duncan, gravely. "I represent the relation who allow Mrs. Clements the best part of her little income. May I ask to what special anxiety you allude?"

"Her daughter's illness," said Mrs. Gresham, as she began to write the address rapidly on a slip of paper. "I believe there is no hope of her recovery."

Harold had never thought of wishing for Augusta's death. She stood between him and happiness. She was emphatically the curse of his life; but he had never hoped for her death. He was glad to remember it now.

"Which daughter?" asked Mr. Duncan, sharply. "There are two, I believe?"

"One has been in India for years," replied Mrs. Gresham. "The invalid was a widow, and lived at home with her mother. I never happen to have heard her name, for you must understand, we had no previous acquaintance with the family. My husband answered Mrs. Clements' advertisement for a tenant for this house; and, feeling sorry for her, we have taken in letters, and once or twice given her a bed for the night when she had to come to London on business; but I really know very little about her."

The visitors thanked the lady, and took their leave.

As they turned out into the quiet street, for a few moments no one spoke; then Mr. Duncan said, gravely,—

"You will go to Bournemouth at once, I suppose? Lord Keith, one can hardly congratulate you on a fellow-creature's death; but it does seem to me—if that nice little woman is right—that before long you will have your freedom."

"You think the note was genuine, then?" said Keith, thoughtfully. "But why did she give me no address?"

"Probably because they were constantly moving about, and she knew Mrs. Gresham would be able to give it you. She may have anticipated some delay in your getting the letter, and have guessed she and her mother would have left the place they were then staying at before it reached you."

It was strange that the two men seemed to have suddenly changed places. It was the young Viscount who now seemed suspicious and hard to be convinced, the shrewd lawyer who accepted things just as they appeared to be. Perhaps Harold had so much at stake it made him hard to be persuaded.

"I shall go to Bournemouth by the earliest train in the morning," he said, slowly. "I wish you would come too."

"Impossible!" replied the lawyer; "besides, I can not see the necessity. While we feared some conspiracy was afoot, you required a witness; but now you have it on Mrs. Gresham's testimony that one of Mrs. Clements'

daughters is dangerously ill. As I never saw your wife, I could not help you to identify her. Surely, though you may never have felt an iota of regard for the girl who spoilt your life, you must remember her features sufficiently to recognise her again?"

"Of course, but—"

"You may find that the invalid is the younger sister; but hardly, as Mrs. Gresham spoke as though she had been abroad for years, and we know your wife was in England in June. You cannot be imposed on. Were you the simplest country peasant or the most learned professor, you could solve the one simple question—is the woman dying at North-terrace, Bournemouth, the same you were cajoled into marrying three years ago?"

CHAPTER X.

It seemed to Ivy Martin that the world had suddenly grown brighter as she listened to Harold's love story. That she, who had always been regarded as a burden and an incumbrance by her own kindred should actually be chosen by such a man to be his partner for life! That she who had been despised and looked down upon by the Collyers should have a lover of her own was wonderful!

Poor, little lonely heart. It was not Keith's rank or honours, future or present, that attracted her. Ivy never thought that his wife would be "my lady," and some day a Countess. All she prized was his love.

No one had ever yet loved her more than all the world! Until she came to Stocks, poor girl, she had had but scant affection of any kind. The Tregarthans were kind to her and petted her like some favourite child, but she was not necessary to complete their happiness. They did not really need her, and to be needed by some one was the poor girl's ambition. And now her hero, the man who had saved her life, told her he loved her, and that soon he would claim her for his own before all the world.

Nothing mattered any more to Ivy. Though she must leave Stocks, and go back to her aunt's austere guardianship, though her bright summer holiday was over, she was in joyous spirits—for Harold loved her!

To be loved. That had been the passionate craving of her lonely heart, and lo! her prayer was granted! Innocent and simple-minded as she was, Ivy knew that between Miss Martin's niece and Lord Rossmoor's son was a wide difference of position. She believed the "shadow" Harold hinted at was his father's disapproval. She thought loyalty to his parents prevented his telling anyone else of his attachment until they had sanctioned it; and she was content to wait.

It was a woman's love and a child's trust she gave her hero. She would no more have doubted Lord Keith's faith than she could have doubted her own heart. She would go back to her aunts cheerfully, knowing that their gloomy rule could not last long. Very soon her lover would come to claim her, and then—

Lady Tregarthan, sending for Ivy to her boudoir to have a few farewell words with her, was astonished at the brightness of her face.

"Why, child, are you so glad to leave us?" she asked, in her surprise.

"I shall miss you terribly!" replied Ivy, gently; "but you have made my life so happy. It can never be grey or sorrowful any more!"

"Remember, Ivy," said her friend, "if you are not happy with your aunts, write to me, and I will find you a situation! I had begun to think about it, but Miss Martin recalled you so suddenly I had no time to make inquiries!"

Ivy's eyes thanked her. "I have been so happy!" repeated the girl, dreamily. "I shall love Dalbury always!"

Belle took leave of her little friend affectionately.

"We shall meet again, Ivy. When I go to Rossmoor I will get mamma to invite you to meet me. I should like you to know the old place where Harold and I were born."

Lady Tregarthan sent her own maid to London with Ivy. She would not let the girl travel alone to the dreary suburb where the Misses Martin had taken up their abode.

Ivy's heart sank as her cab stopped before a dull, dingy-looking house, in a narrow street.

Hitherto she had felt none of the stings of poverty. She had known, of course, her aunts were not rich. Butler, lady's-maid, and carriage were beyond their means, but the cottage at Dalbury had no sign of poverty. It was gloomy enough inside, but the garden had, at least, been bright with flowers without, and within Bridges's tidy ways had kept all trim and orderly.

Here shabbiness and discomfort prevailed. The gate was off its hinges, the bell broken, the paint blistered and weather-stained, the windows in great need of cleaning.

Ivy felt a lump in her throat as she knocked at the door. What must the maid think of her surroundings? Could there be any mistake, and the cab have stopped at the wrong house? But no, this was forty-nine; and a grimy servant presently appearing, Mills said good day to her little charge, and Ivy found herself alone on the threshold of her new home.

There were tears in her eyes. For three months she had not cost her aunts a sixpence—for three months they had been free of her! Surely they might have made the exertion just to come to the door and meet her? But no!

Up two flights of stairs Ivy toiled after the grimy servant. Then, on the second floor, she was shown into a good-sized sitting-room, where the two aunts sat at work.

Even then they showed no signs of welcome. Miss Marion went on knitting, Miss Laura continued her darning.

They looked up at Ivy as she entered as calmly as though they had seen her every day for a month, and, finally, Miss Laura said, composedly,—

"Your hat is terribly on one side, Ivy!" while Miss Marion chimed in with,—

"Shut the door, my dear, there is a terrible draught!"

Poor little Ivy!

She had been living in such an atmosphere of love and sympathy. She had had so much kindness and affection shown her that she felt the coldness more than she would have done three months ago.

Her aunts looked just the same. Their muslin caps and snuff-coloured merino dresses were the very ones they had worn at the cottage. It was the old loveless life she had come back to. The two old ladies were just the same—only she herself was changed.

With a strange feeling of being rebuked like a little child, she shut the door; and then, taking a chair near her eldest aunt, began to inquire about her eyes.

It seemed the operation had been perfectly successful, and Miss Martin had recovered her sight, but the treatment had been very expensive, and they would have to economise in all things.

"You must try and conquer your extravagant habits!" said Miss Marion, severely. "I am afraid Lady Tregarthan has spoilt you!"

"She was very kind!"

"Over-indulgence is no true kindness. However, it does not really matter much. Providence has been very kind to you, Ivy, and I think, in a short time, you will be provided for."

Ivy thought so too, though not quite in the same way as Miss Marion meant. It was the latter who conducted the whole conversation. Her sister rarely spoke; but Ivy, who knew every movement of her aunts, felt that Miss Laura, for once, was not in harmony with her sister, and objected to her statements.

"Better let well alone!" ventured the



["MRS. HAROLD IS NOT HERE, SIR!" THE LITTLE SERVANT SAID CIVILLY TO MR. DUNCAN.]

younger spinster. "My dear Marion, there's an old proverb—let sleeping dogs lie!"

"I don't believe in proverbs," returned her sister, speaking with authority as the eldest. "Ivy has been a heavy burden to us, sister; but she's our own flesh and blood, and we're bound to do our best for her. You're put out perhaps because I made the discovery instead of you, but that's very foolish of you!"

Aunt Laura looked troubled. If she had been capable of such a weakness, Ivy would have said she was nearly crying.

"It's dangerous work playing with edged tools," she remarked, mildly. "I only hope, sister, you won't hurt yourself!"

"I'm not afraid!" said Miss Martin, bridling a little, "and I mean to carry it through, Laura; so you must just make up your mind to it."

"Ivy may not be willing," suggested Laura, whereupon Miss Martin frowned at her niece, and answered, sharply,—

"Ivy is not quite an idiot, I hope. She's stupid enough for most things, but even she must see it's better to be provided for."

Ivy found her voice at last.

"Please don't quarrel about me. I am not at all afraid of being poor, and—"

"There is no need for you to be poor," interrupted her elder aunt. "I have sent for you on purpose to finish the business. Just pass me my writing case."

Ivy obeyed. When Miss Martin took out a newspaper cutting she was quite prepared to find it referred to some situation she would be required to help for.

The Misses Martin took in a weekly journal entitled the "Practical Christian," whose columns contained many a list of persons "Wanted."

In her dreams of independence Ivy had even got as far as reading through the advertisements in one number; but though many young ladies were needed as teachers and mothers' helps, the remuneration offered chiefly con-

sisted of a pious house, Christian companionship, laundress, and beer, so that Ivy had never been lured into offering her services.

But the advertisement Aunt Marion read aloud was of a very different nature.

"Wanted, the address of Katharine Newton, who in the year 1865 married James Martin, of Chepstow, Monmouthshire. Any person giving information leading to the discovery of this lady or her children will be liberally rewarded!"

Ivy looked bewildered.

"Was that my mother?"

Miss Laura coolly turned her back on them at this juncture—an expression of disapproval which did not trouble her sister in the least.

"Your father and mother!" returned Aunt Marion, firmly. "I have always done my duty to you, Ivy, and so, of course, I answered this advertisement."

"I thought mamma's name was Dora?"

Both the sisters turned round and stared at her.

"She was not christened so," said Aunt Laura. "It was nothing but a pet name!"

"Her name was Katharine," repeated Miss Marion, calmly, "and you are her only child. I found this advertisement was inserted by her uncle, a Mr. Newton, who has recently come home from India. He had quite lost sight of all his relations during the forty odd years he has been away. At first they wrote often, then letters failed, and the last event in the family that he ever heard of was your mother's wedding."

"He is a rich man," said Miss Laura, with a kind of choked sob, "richer than you can dream of, child. But, oh! Ivy, don't you take a penny of his money. It will do you no good. You had better earn your living at plain needlework than accept any of Abraham Newton's gold!"

Ivy looked bewildered.

"Is he so very wicked?" she asked, slowly.

"Wicked!" cried Miss Marion. "He's a

most worthy man. Didn't I tell you he has made more money than he knows what to do with, and he wants to leave it all to his niece Katharine's little girl!"

"Marion!" cried her sister. "How can you!"

"Laura," retorted Miss Martin, "have the goodness to hold your tongue. I am Ivy's eldest aunt, and therefore her fittest adviser. Wealth may be a snare, but it's a much more comfortable state than poverty. There's a fortune waiting for the child, and I intend her to have it!"

"Then a bitter judgment will fall on you both," prophesied Miss Laura, wringing her hands. "Oh! Marion, think better of it, and don't do such a wrong!"

"It's no wrong," returned her sister, "unless we've been doing a wrong these twenty years!"

"At least we've never told a lie about it before," said Miss Laura, sorrowfully. "We've only just kept silence."

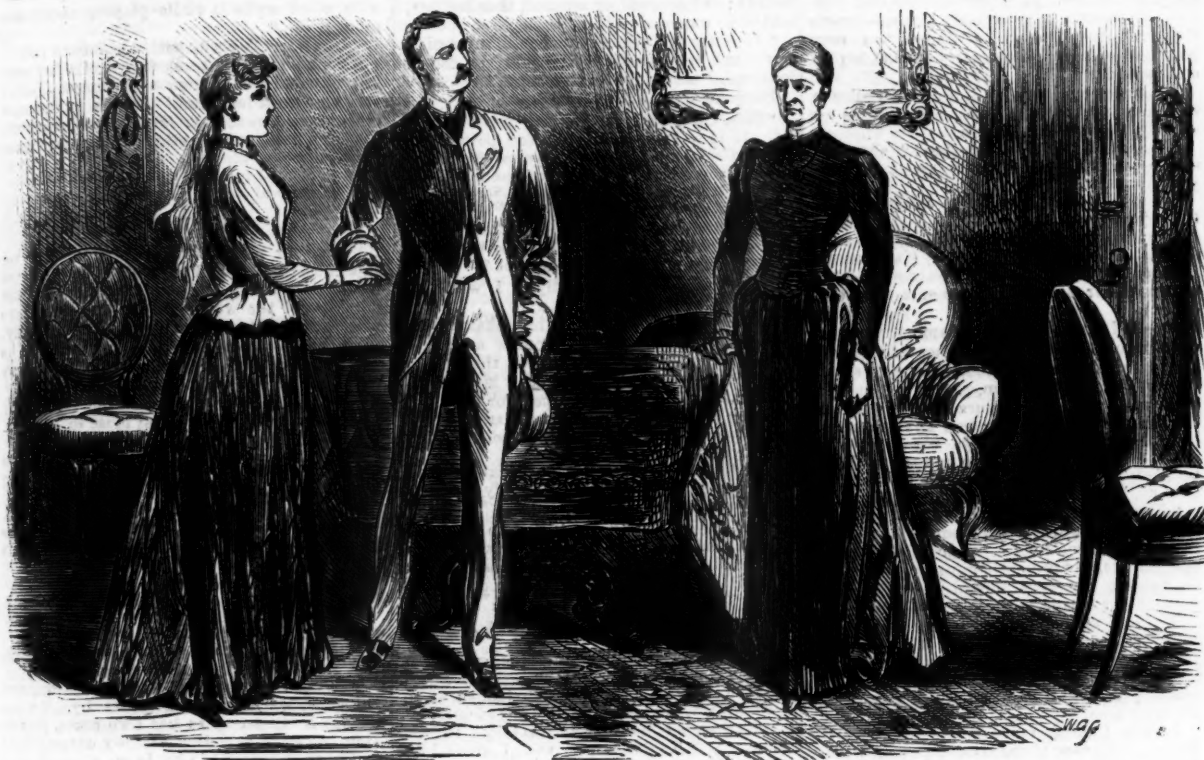
"It's no use your talking," said Miss Martin, decidedly. "I sent word to Mr. Newton that Ivy was coming home this afternoon, and I shouldn't wonder if he came round to-day."

"I don't want to see him," said Ivy, quietly. "However rich he is, I don't want his money!"

"Your opinion won't be asked," replied Aunt Marion, amiably. "You've been a trouble and burden to us all your life, and now there's a chance of your being provided for I don't mean you to throw it away!"

(To be continued.)

THE chief secret of comfort lies in not suffering trifles to vex us, and in prudently cultivating our undergrowth of small pleasures, since very few great ones, alas! are let on long leases.



"MY PLACE IS HERE!" CYNTHIA SAID, GIVING HER HAND TO KNIFE.

NOVELLETTE.]

WE THREE GIRLS.

CHAPTER I.

We are all in disgrace, and awaiting our certain punishment with what fortitude we may. Cynthia, sitting in the deep window, with flushed face and mutinous mouth, looks lovelier than ever. Nan, in the easiest and least elegant attitude she can strike, is giving vent now and again to curious sounds, suggestive of rage and despair; whilst Molly (that's me) walks restlessly up and down, wishing the next half hour over.

After all, we have done nothing very terrible. Cynthia, who is grown up, being seventeen, has secretly won a lover, and, being discovered in the offence, has had to undergo a very bad time with Madame.

Nan and I have suffered in a less degree, for aiding and abetting our sister in her offence.

"It is hard," Nan says, savagely, "that we should never have any fun; that year in and year out we should suffer martyrdom at old Bozzy's hands!"

Reverence is a quality unknown to her, and she vulgarly and familiarly terms our stately French governess and guardian "Bozzy." I wonder what Madame Bosanquet would say could she hear her?

As no one speaks, Nan takes up her parable again.

"If people have children they should not leave them to the mercy of a horrid old woman, who is without heart and without conscience. I'm sure I should not know mamma and papa from Adam and Eve were we to meet to-morrow. I want to know what right papa had to go off to Africa, where the people don't want missionaries half as badly as they do in our large cities!"

"I think he meant to do his duty," I suggest humbly, for Nan has a sharp tongue and hasty temper.

"Duty! Fiddlesticks! His duty is to us, and not to those beastly blacks!"

"You're talking of something you don't understand," says Cynthia, calmly.

"Am I," and Nan jerks herself erect. "Let me tell you, Madame Cynthia, you don't monopolize all the brains of the family. If you did you wouldn't have let Madame find out your 'tricks and manners!'"

"It was not my fault," indignantly. "If Jane had not been mean enough to tell—"

"I shall love that girl for this," viciously.

"If I don't make her repent in sackcloth and ashes before a month is gone my name is not Nan Kirby. I wonder what Mr. Calvert will say when you tell him what you have undergone for his sake? Make your story as pathetic as you can."

"Be quiet. Little girls of fifteen should be seen, but not heard."

"Stale advice, my dear! Molly, for pity's sake, sit down. Your constant perambulations worry me. Oh, here she comes!" as the rustle of a dress is heard outside. "Now for ten minutes' purgatory. Ring up the curtain, and enter—Bozzy!"

The last word is said in a whisper, and as it dies out the door opens, and Madame enters—a tall, thin, ugly woman, with cold eyes and a hard mouth. Advancing a little she calls Cynthia to her, and very slowly, very unwillingly, our sister obeys.

"There is no need to comment further on your very unladylike conduct," Madame says, in a cold voice, and with scarcely any accent. "I have already shown you the enormity of your offence, and by the next mail I shall acquaint your parents with the whole story. Hold out your hand," and she produces the slender cane, with which we have long been acquainted.

"Madame, no!" says Cynthia, hurriedly.

"Do not so far degrade me. I am not a child. Find some other way to punish me!"

"Hold out your hand!" repeats the hated voice.

"I will not!" and Nan and I hold our breath with fear.

The dusky colour leaps into Madame's face, and her eyes flash. Just a moment she is staggered by Cynthia's audacity. Then she recovers herself, and lifting the cane she brings it smartly down across her shoulders. The next instant it is wrenched from her hold, broken in two, and the fragments flung from the window.

Fear holds us in breathless silence a moment; then Nan, who is always impatient, begins to giggle immoderately; but a glance from Madame quenches her mirth.

"How dare you so insolently defy me!" she demands of Cynthia, who stands trembling with anger and indignation.

"How dare you so insult me? You might have known I—a woman grown—would not submit to such an indignity!"

"Be quiet, girl! You are in my charge. I am responsible to your parents for your safety and well-being; and I never neglect my duty!"

(For all that she is wise enough not to attempt castigation again.)

"You will go to your room and remain there until you show a proper spirit, and promise to reject at once, and for ever, all thought of this dishonourable lover, of whom you appear so proud. Your sisters will be denied any intercourse with you until you submit to my conditions."

Without a word Cynthia goes out, her head reared high, her lips set in a firm line; and then Madame turns her kindly attentions upon us.

"I hold you guilty, only in a less degree than Cynthia; and I intend to keep you prisoners in your respective rooms for the remainder of the day. Jane will bring you

bread and water. Take your lessons with you. I expect them to be thoroughly known—double the quantity of each. I hoped you were honourable girls, and am sorry to find myself so deceived."

We make our way to the door in silence, but there Nan pauses; Cynthia's example has already had its effect on her.

"I shall write to my father!" she says, tempestuously. "He would never sanction your abominable tyranny!"

"Go!" Madame answers, coldly. "You but injure your own cause."

Upstairs we toll, looking blankly at each other. At my door we pause. (It is one of Madame's peculiarities that we are not allowed to share our sleeping apartments with each other.)

"I shall run away!" Nan announces, with such resolution that I beg her affrightedly not to think of such a thing; but she stands heroically by her decision.

"I can't and won't endure Boszy's nonsense any longer! And if you had any courage or affection for me you would come too. We could beg our way out to mamma. When people heard our story they would be sure to help us."

"They would be more likely to send us back to Boszy again!" I say dismally; and then, hearing Madame's voice, we scurrier into our apartments, and presently have the satisfaction of hearing the keys turned in the locks to prevent our escape.

Try as I may, I cannot master my lessons to-day; the abstruse sums, the dreadful French verbs get inextricably mixed; and finally, in despair, I close the books, and leaning from the window let the soft, warm air blow upon my heated face.

I wish I could make you understand the beauty and peace of the landscape before me—the home-like look of our pretty old house! As far as the eye can reach I see gentle hills and little valleys, rich fields of undulating corn, a splendid growth of branching trees, with a silvery streak of water running through the whole! Here and there a white cottage, and far away to the left a grey old church and vicarage (the latter was once our home).

And then this dear old house of ours! It is only two stories high, with a verandah running all round; and come when you will this verandah is bright with creepers, flowers or berries! A large garden encloses it, shut in by a high hedge, and entered from the outside by a green door; and Madame, who has unlimited authority, is careful that the grounds should be exquisitely kept.

She is not a bad woman, only one utterly without feeling or tenderness (I often fall to pitying her dead husband—what a life she must have led him!) But she acts up to her lights, and is, I believe, strictly honourable.

Ten years ago, when papa felt it incumbent upon him to go to Africa, he placed us in her charge, knowing her to be a clever governess, and a woman of good principles; but I think, could he realise how desolate we feel, how utterly friendless and at her mercy, he would have returned long ago. He writes us that he is coming home "for good" next year; but that is so long to wait, and who can tell what may happen before then!

Like Nan, I almost question papa's love and wisdom in leaving us to the mercy of an alien; and now, to make matters worse, Cynthia has a lover.

This is how it happened. We had been to the Rostory to take tea, and were coming home in the best of spirits, when we chanced upon a gentleman (I don't care what Madame says, I know Keith Calvert is one). He was sitting on a bank, ruefully regarding a broken bicycle; and, as we drew near, he tried to raise himself, but failed.

"I beg your pardon!" he said, looking fall at Cynthia, "but might I ask your help? I have smashed my machine, and hurt my knee so that I cannot walk. If I might presume so far—"

"Of course you may!" Nan broke in

hastily; and he, looking amused, thanked her, and went on.

"If you would send some one to my assistance, and tell me where I could get decent lodgings, I should be very grateful."

Blushing beautifully Cynthia said,—

"Mrs. Chapman has two very nice rooms to let. It is at the general shop and post-office; but you would suffer no annoyance from customers, there being a private entrance. Shall we turn back and send help from there?"

"I hate to trouble you, but I should be really grateful; and if Mrs. Chapman has a vehicle of any sort I should be glad to use it. Oh! you are not all going, are you?"

"No," said Nan, promptly. "I will stay with you"—and she does.

When we return we find her chatting in quite a friendly manner to our new acquaintance, to whom we impart the news that a light cart will soon arrive for him, and Mrs. Chapman has promised to do her best for him.

There is really no need for us to stay longer. Already the cart is in sight; so with a little bow Cynthia says,—

"Help is at hand for you, so that we may wish you good evening, and a speedy recovery from your hurt!"

"Thank you, Miss Kirby!" and he laughs at her startled look. "Oh! I already know your name and story. Your sister has been giving me quite a graphic account of all your belongings. Thank you again and again for your goodness, and I hope we shall meet again very soon!"

Then we are walking homewards, and Cynthia says, vexedly,—

"Nan, how could you be so foolish as to acquaint a perfect stranger with our identity?"

"Exchange is no robbery. He told me his name. It is Keith Calvert, and I think him remarkably nice!"

No more is said on the subject then, and none of us consider if our duty to make Madame acquainted with our adventure.

The next day we are commissioned by that lady to procure some note-paper as we go through the village; and Mrs. Chapman, having no other customers to attend to, begins to speak of her lodger.

"He's a nice, civil gentleman!" she says, "and gives very little trouble. Just now he managed to get down into the garden. Won't you go and speak to him, young ladies. It must be lonely for him here."

Cynthia answers hastily in the negative; but Nan, as usual, overpowers us both.

"Of course we will, Mrs. Chapman. It will only be playing the good Samaritan," and, as she turns to follow the good woman, we are compelled to do the same.

Mr. Calvert is unfeignedly glad to see us. He is looking a trifle pale and very interesting—at least, I think so; and having once engaged Cynthia in conversation, he is very unwilling to let us go.

After this his wound heals rapidly, and soon he is able to get about, and then, wherever we go, we meet him.

"I seem to know by a happy instinct where to find you!" he says, laughing down at Cynthia's lovely, flushed face, "and I always act upon it. You are not angry?"

"No; but I am afraid Madame would be if she knew how frequently we met you!"

"Why should she be? Miss Kirby—Cynthia—I want to speak to you!" and then Nan and I discreetly drop behind. And from this day Keith and our sister are declared lovers; but no one is the wiser save ourselves.

Then, one unlucky evening, Jane our housemaid, sees Cynthia parting from him, and, being a very mean young woman, carries the news to Madame. Hence our disgrace and punishment!

As I sit here thinking of all these things a curious cracking on the verandah roof startles me, and, turning my head, I see Nan creeping stealthily along the slates.

She holds up a warning finger, and in a moment or two reaching my window, enters

with a triumphant smile playing about her mouth.

"Oh, Nan!" I whisper, "how dare you?"

"Pooh! there isn't any danger of a fall, and I never could bear solitary confinement. I shall stay here until luncheon! Such a sumptuous repast it will be to-day. Speak low, and then Madame need guess nothing of my last escapade."

CHAPTER II.

"I REALLY can't help laughing!" goes on this incorrigible. "For the last hour Keith has been walking up and down, just on the outskirts of the wood. I fancy he must have been witness to my exploits. Look, Molly, there he is—poor fellow! I wonder if he is most cross or anxious? I mean to find a way of letting him know the truth."

"But how, Nan? We're locked in."

"Stupid! We shall be let loose to-morrow. Poor old Keith! I'm quite sorry for him."

"And I am sorrier for Cynthia. Nan, you didn't mean what you said about running away?"

"Yes, I did!" nodding her blonde head, vehemently; "and I shall do it unless Madame alters her tactics. I can't submit any longer, and—"

"Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!"

she sings, in a tolerably loud voice.

"Hush! hush! You will be overheard, and that will make matters worse."

For once she is amenable to reason, and the slow, warm morning wears by. At one o'clock Nan returns to her own room, just in time to escape detection, and my unappetising luncheon is brought in by Jane.

But I am so healthily hungry that even bread and water are sweet to me.

The afternoon Nan spends with Cynthia, consoling her with dismal stories of captive maidens, dying for love of some unlucky suitor, and touching recitals of broken hearts and slow-wasting beauty; and having succeeded in making her companion utterly wretched, retires to her own room, with the proud consciousness of having done her duty.

The next morning we are liberated; but Cynthia, who will make no terms with Madame, is still kept in "durance vile." Lessons over, we are allowed to take the usual walk, under strict injunctions to avoid Keith.

Nan listens demurely, and promises the obedience I am morally certain she will not give; and out we go into the glorious sunshine. We turn towards the village, and shortly are joined by Keith. Nan gives a sharp look round, then says,—

"I wanted to see you, but it is dangerous for us to be together—"

He interrupts her hastily.

"Where is Cynthia? What has happened?"

"At present she is a prisoner for conscience sake. Madame knows all about you, and has sent Cynthia to her room, where she is to stay until she promises to forget all about you."

"And what does Cynthia say?" he questions, eagerly.

"Can't you guess? Molly and I had to suffer because of you, too. You ought to be very grateful to us for the help we have given you, and the risk we run in speaking to you now."

"What objection does Madame Bosanquet urge against me, Molly?"

"Oh!" I answer, smiling, "she says you are some low-born, unprincipled adventurer, who is amusing himself by trifling with Cynthia's heart!"

He flushes hotly.

"Madame and I must have a speedy reckoning. I shall come up to the house to-day. Will you tell Cynthia that, and ask her to see me—at three-thirty?"

"Of course we will; and now, Keith, we

must say good bye. Oh, I never had such a good time before!"

"You heartless little wretch! I believe you take positive delight in our discomfiture."

"I never had an opportunity of studying young lovers before," retorts Nan, pertly, as she hurries me unceremoniously away. "Oh, dear! oh, dear!" she says, laughing until she is nearly breathless. "What a tempest in a tea cup there will be! Molly, I intend being on the scene when Keith has his battle with Bozzy."

"You will not be allowed."

"I shall not ask permission. I shall hide myself in some nook or other where I can hear and see, without being heard or seen."

"That is dishonourable!" I say, with an attempt at severity; but Nan is incorrigible.

"Don't preach, Molly. I daresay it was a wise dispensation of Providence to give you all the virtues, seeing Cynthia and I stole all the good looks. Now, when I reach home, I am going to Bozzy with a message from Keith. You shall see what diplomacy I am capable of!"

And she keeps her word. As we sit at inncheon she says, turning calm eyes on Madame,—

"We met Mr. Calvert this morning; and when we would have passed him (in obedience to your wishes) he compelled us to exchange words with him. I told him your decision about Cynthia, and he begs you will permit him to see you on the subject to-day."

"Very well," Madame answers, and as we go out, we hear her bid Jane show Mr. Calvert into the west parlour.

"She could not have chosen a better room," says Nan; "it is so convenient. And, Molly, unless you are as mean a sneak as Jane, you will join me. Then, if we should be caught, why it won't be half so bad to suffer together as it would be separately!"

And, finding all resistance vain, I submit to her wishes with my best grace, although, to confess the truth, I am more than a little afraid. Having informed Cynthia of her lover's determination (surreptitiously of course), we wait with what patience we may for Keith's arrival. But long before half-past three Nan says it is time to take proceedings, so we steal noiselessly down to the west parlour.

It is a long, low room, and Madame detests it because it is given to dampness. At one end is a very large cupboard, which however, is never used, owing to the said moistness. In this Nan and I take up our quarters.

Oh! how slowly the minutes pass! And more than once I am afraid Nan's rashness will result in our detection! She is constantly opening the door and thrusting out her curly head.

Punctually to the time, Madame enters the room. The next moment the hall bell rings, and we grasp each other's hands tightly—I in fear, Nan in the hope of staying her laughter. Each takes her turn at the keyhole; and presently I see Keith, standing hat in hand, tall, handsome, determined. Madame measures him with her cold eyes, and waits for him to speak, which he is not slow to do.

"I have the honour to be Miss Kirby's accepted lover, but I understand you have grave objections to my suit! May I ask why?"

"It would be a terrible matter for Miss Kirby to connect herself with one of whom we know nothing! Sir, we are totally ignorant as to your birth and standing!"

"I am a gentleman!"

"You must prove that," insolently; "and even if you can, I should not sanction any engagement without the approval of my pupils' parents."

"There, Madame, you set within your province, but you go beyond when you refuse me justice, or admission to Miss Kirby, and treat her like a criminal!"

"Mon Dieu!" says Madame, with a theatrical gesture. "Is it like a gentleman to win a girl clandestinely? Is it not criminal

for that girl to take a lover without the sanction or knowledge of her parents? Things are ordered differently in France. But sir, let me ask, can you produce any proofs of gentle birth or means—any person who can testify to the truth of your statements?"

"I can and will to Mr. Kirby; but I refuse your right to demand them!"

"Bravo, Keith!" whispers Nan, although, indeed, I am half angry with him.

"I can only conclude, then, that they are utterly without foundation!"

"You need say no more, Madame. I know you have called me a 'low-born, unprincipled adventurer,' and I am quite willing you should think me so. I will not gratify your curiosity, or submit to your insolence. I only ask that before I go you will permit me to see Miss Kirby?"

"You ask too much. I will not allow an interview between you and my pupil!"

"Madame, I am here!" and there stands Cynthia in the open doorway, flushed, but resolute. "It is my right to know the best or worst."

"Go back to your room," Madame says angrily, "this is no place for you."

"My place is here!" Cynthia answers, and steps quickly towards Keith, who takes her hands in his, and says,—

"My dear, Madame Bosanquet is pleased to call my honour and my respectability into question, and I—unused to such contempt—refuse to give any explanation save to your father. Can you trust me?"

"With all my heart!"

"This grows interesting," whispers Nan. "Now let me hear Madame."

"We have not long to wait."

"I consider, sir, you have behaved most dishonourably, and Miss Kirby's conduct has not been what I could desire or expect after the careful training she has received. I utterly refuse to lend my countenance to any engagement, or to allow any correspondence between you. I do not believe the alliance would be suitable in any respect!"

"Then we must take our cause into our own hands; but I warn you, Madame, you are driving us to deceit and rebellion!"

"I will guard against them both. If I am outwitted I am not to blame."

"You may rest assured, madam, that whilst I shall do nothing dishonourable, I shall yet refuse utterly to relinquish my claim to Miss Kirby's hand! For the rest, I may say that, if I am a poor man, I am still a gentleman, and her equal! Cynthia, my darling, you will be true to me?"

"Always!" is her emphatic answer.

"Whatever you may hear, whatever may be told you, do not doubt my loyalty. But write soon to papa. Suspense and imprisonment are hard to bear!"

"My dear one! my dear one!" Then he turns to Madame, saying, "You will, perhaps, allow us five minutes alone?" and I feel very guilty to think we shall be witnesses of these poor creatures' farewells. But Madame has no bowels of compassion, and says, irately,—

"Five minutes! Not one, sir! Cynthia, go to your room!"

With a rapid gesture Cynthia turns to her lover.

"Good-bye, dear! I will think of you every day! I will never fall you nor forsake you!" And with that she lifts her mouth to his, and kisses him once, solemnly and sadly, so that even Nan is subdued. Then she goes from the room. And Keith, his face all white and quivering, turns to our governess.

"Whatever happens in the future lies at your door! I hold you, and you only, to blame!" and, bowing, he takes his leave.

Left alone, Madame stands silent a moment; then, with a wild movement of her hands to her head, says in a low voice,—

"These girls! these girls! Why should I labour early and late for them? What wage do I earn but hate and scorn? With all my heart I despise them! I loathe them—for

their mother's sake! Oh, Henry! Henry! had you loved me I might have been a happy woman!"

In that hour, and from this hour, I shall pity, even whilst I dislike, her. I am ashamed to think in what a mean way I had learned her secret—the secret she had so long and carefully guarded—her love for my father!

Looking very old and worn she moves to the window, and there stands a moment, speechless, moveless. Then, all of a sudden, she cries quite wildly,—

"My heart bled and broke because of her! Let her child suffer as I have done, until all that is fair and beautiful in her is transformed and hideous! She is like her mother, she will soon forget; but I—I, Jacqueline Bosanquet, never forget!"

She is dreadful in her anguish and rage, and we two girls sit clasping each other fast—afraid to move, almost afraid to breathe.

What if she should discover us yet? But she does not.

Walking to a mirror she quietly and adroitly smooths her hair, and refastens her spotless collar, and, with very much her usual manner, goes out to superintend some household matters.

Nan slips out of her hiding-place, and, shaking her clenched fist at the retreating figure, says irately,—

"So you have the impudence to love my father! Why, Bozzy, dear, you might be his mother; and you're resolved to make Cynthia unhappy! You don't know who you've got to fight against! Come, Molly, we've heard enough. All we have to do now is to fight that old dragon!"

"I can't help feeling sorry for her; and I wish Keith had been more explicit."

"Oh, it's a well-known fact that you are a born croaker; and I should like to know how a girl of your age can forgive and forget old insults and harshness?"

"I am afraid I don't forget. But, still, it is sad to think of Madame's wasted love."

"I can't see with your eyes," contemptuously. "I heard Granny Dyball the other day say that when Madame first came here, a newly-made widow, she was always running after papa; but he was as blind as a mole, and did not guess at it. And Granny said, when he married mamma, she was like a wild woman!"

"You should not listen to such gossip," I say, severely.

"Oh, I'm always open to receive instruction. And it is just as well to have the whip-hand of Bozzy. Now, take off your shoes, and steal upstairs like a midnight marauder. I am going to Cynthia."

Nan finds Cynthia in tears; and, to lessen her misery, tells her she has heard Madame vowing dreadful vows against her peace and Keith's; and not until our sister's lovely eyes are all swollen and disfigured does she relent, and tell the whole truth.

Then Cynthia flashes on her.

"You are very ornal, Nan! You do not care how much I suffer. You only care for your own amusement. Oh! how can you torture me like this?"

And Nan, full of contrition, steals to her side, lays her pretty head on Cynthia's shoulders, saying,—

"I'm a horrid little wretch! but I really don't believe I am quite so bad as I might be. What's your opinion, Cynthia?"

CHAPTER III.

"CYNTHIA, I must speak to you," and there, before us, stands Keith; his clothes all torn and disordered by his scurramble through our hedge.

"Oh, Keith! this is very dangerous. Madame would be most angry to find you here!"

"She must not. Molly, keep a sharp lookout, like a good girl. You need not go away, I have nothing to say that you may not hear.

Cynthia, my dear one, after my very out dismissal yesterday, what are we to do?"

"I don't know," hopelessly. "I suppose we must wait until we hear from papa."

"Apparently you think me a patient fellow. Well, I'm not; and who can tell how that horrid woman may represent our case? I may be forbidden to hope!"

"Whatever comes," she says, earnestly, "I shall always love you, Keith. Perhaps this trial is sent to test our hearts; and, if things had gone well with us, I never should have shown you so plainly how dear you are to me!"

"You darling," and at this point I discreetly turn my head.

"Oh, Keith! remember Molly," whispers Cynthia. "You must not kiss me any more."

"I should like to know who has a right to kiss you if I have not? But, Cynthia, I want to talk seriously now—really. I have been thinking that it would be best to take matters into our own hands, and get married without asking any one's permission."

"Oh!" and his rash proposal takes away her breath.

"Well, why not? You can trust me! And you're not afraid of poverty."

"You feel I trust you. Dear Keith, are you very poor?"

"Why?" quickly. "Should you love me less? Well, I have enough for our wants if your tastes are as simple as mine. I can give you a pretty cottage in the country, and we shall not want for necessities."

"Oh, I don't call that being poor! But—but, dear Keith, you—you are not in earnest in asking this thing?"

"I was never more so in my life," emphatically.

"But I cannot. Oh, don't you see how such a step would grieve my parents, and alienate me from my sisters? Oh, as you love me, do not urge this upon me!"

"You mean that I am less to you than your family? That you are content to say good-bye to me, and go back to your old life?"

"Not content; and indeed, indeed, Heaven forgive me if it is a sin, I love you better than all the world beside; but I am too young and ignorant to be a wife! Wait a little, Keith, until I am older and wiser, more able to make you happy. You foolish boy, don't you know I am only seventeen?"

"Many girls are married younger. You hesitate because your faith and love are less than mine."

"You wrong me," distressfully, "and when you are calmer you will acknowledge this. Listen a moment to me, dear! Is it not true that in order to marry me without my father's consent you must commit perjury?"

Unwillingly he answers "yes."

"And the punishment for perjury is heavy? Shall I, who love you, bring trouble upon you? No, no! Let us wait in hope and patience for papa's reply and, if it should prove unfavourable, I promise by all that I hold sacred or dear to keep faith with you, until I may become your wife without fear or wrong!"

"You are content to wait four years! You are more lukewarm than I!" he cries, very bitterly, and Cynthia stands silent a moment, grieved and pale.

Then she lays a gentle hand upon his arm, and says, with a tender dignity quite new in my experience of her,—

"Were it quite safe to consent to your prayer, I would still refuse. My husband shall never have cause to blush for me, or in after years reproach me for unmaidenly conduct. I know that people regard runaway brides with suspicion and contempt, and even for your dear sake I will not lose my woman's priceless treasure—my good name!"

He stands looking down at her vexedly a moment, then the fine, frank face clears, and his eyes grow inexpressibly tender.

"I never could reproach you for yielding to my urgent wish; but, much as I would like to know it granted, I feel you are wiser than I. And so, dear Cynthia, to-night we must part,

tasting all the bitterness of a long separation; but I will be true to you in word and deed. And trusting you as I do, I ask no promise from you, but that you will write me often. And, when Mr. Kirby's letter reaches me (if it carries the good news I shall hope and pray for) I will return to you at once. I shall direct my letters to the post-office, and I believe that you will find Mrs. Chapman our real friend and ready helper."

"I can see Madame moving about in the veranda," I say, warningly.

"Oh! go, go, Keith! Oh! how hard it is to send you away. Do not forget me!"

"Forget! Cynthia, my darling, my darling! how can you send me away?" And then he catches her close to his heart, and for a little while she speaks in whispers.

She answers nothing—perhaps she cannot, for the heavy sobs that rise to her lips.

"Molly!" in what an altered tone he calls my name. "Molly, take care of her whilst I am gone. You are a good little soul, and will be watchful of her welfare. Good-bye—Cynthia, sweetheart—good-bye!"

"Good-bye—do not forget!" and then he is gone, and my beautiful sister stands looking blankly at me, with the tears running down her white face.

"Don't cry," I urge, with impotent pity.

"Don't cry, Cynthia."

"Oh, Molly! if I should never see him any more! My heart feels breaking!"

"The darkest hour comes before the dawn," I say, sentimentally, "and in a little while all your sky will be bright, and you will wonder and smile over your present grief!"

"You do not understand!" she says, in a low voice, and with her hands pressed hard on her breast. "How should you, Molly? But, oh! if you could but feel for a moment the intolerable ache here, the awful sense of desolation upon me now, you would pity me!"

"I do pity you, dear; but you must not stay here in the wet and cold! Come in; you know Keith told me to be careful of you."

Like a child she turns with me towards the house, but in the veranda she pauses.

"I cannot meet Madame or Nan this evening; they would guess the truth. Say I have gone to my room with a headache; and come to me, Molly, dear, as soon as you can. You do me good—you do me good," and then she passes wearily in, and I make what excuse I can for her absence—poor, lovely, loving Cynthia.

The next day we fall into the old routine. Nan and I go back to our lessons (with very bad grace I am afraid), and Cynthia is allowed utter freedom, Madame having ascertained that "that wolf in sheep's clothing" has left our village; and she likes nothing so well as wandering down to Mrs. Chapman's, there to listen to praises of Keith, and good wishes for her own future and his.

She is paler and quieter than before, and that tinge of melancholy in her lovely violet eyes makes her irresistible.

Nan and I always know when she has received a letter from Keith, because then the shadow on her beauty lifts, and the sweet mouth is ready to smile, the old glad ring comes back to her voice.

It is early July now, and the hay crops are being gathered in. They are especially heavy this year, and the harvest promises to be good.

"I should like," says Nan, dreamily, "to lie like this, and dream all my life away! How sweet the hay smells, and what a pity it is summer so soon goes!"

She is lying on a heap of newly-mown hay, with her hat tilted over her eyes, and her slim fingers idly picking a rose to pieces.

"Do you know you have not written your imposition yet?"

"Now, Molly, what a tease you are! Who could think of impositions on such a day as this? Not I, for one; and I really did not deserve punishment."

I grimace horribly.

"Nan, you were trying this morning."

"Not more so than other people. Don't distort your face in such a fashion. You are not too good-looking at any time. Just now you are positively hideous!"

"And you are brutally frank. Heigho! I wonder how soon we shall hear from papa?"

"Oh! I've no patience with him!" Nan says, savagely. "He thinks more of a 'nigger's' soul than of our three bodies combined; and if you call that parental, and Christian like, I don't. But where's the use of talking. We can't bring him back; and for aught we know to the contrary, he has buried mamma and got a new wife—coal-black!"

"Nan! how dare you talk of him so!"

She curls her under-lip.

"Pooh! what harm have I said, my dear little Puritan! You ought to have flourished in Cromwell's days, and then some goody, goody Roundhead would have appropriated you; and if ever you grew restive he would have 'licked you into shape,' as the boys say. I can see you now, with brown stuff frock and snowy bib and tucker, your eyes cast down demurely, and—"

"If you please, Miss Molly, Madame has sent me to say luncheon waits."

"Let it wait!" answers Nan, recklessly. "We are above such vulgar failings as hunger or thirst; and Jane, hurry in out of the sun. There is a great freckle on the end of your nose, and it spoils your beauty!"

"Nan," I remonstrate, when Jane is gone, "how can you be so provoking? Do you suppose that girl can respect you, or that she does not carry back all your stupid sayings to Madame?"

"I don't care about her opinions or her tale-bearing in the least. Molly, where are you going?"

"Back to luncheon. We ought to obey hard and fast rules, you know!"

"You are a prig!" with more emphasis than politeness. "Wait a moment. I will go with you just to keep you in countenance."

But she loiters so upon the way that we are late, and Madame looks up frowningly as we enter.

"If I were to do my duty I should forbid you to eat!" she says; "and for your impertinence, Nan, you will have your imposition doubled."

You may guess this meal does not pass off very comfortably. When it is ended we go to the schoolroom, where I begin to practise my latest fantasia; and Nan sits biting her penholder, and sulkily kicking her legs to and fro. Presently Madame enters.

"Is your task done?" she asks, and I am bound to confess Nan's answer is given in a most disrespectful tone. The words are simple enough. "I can't do it!" The tone says, "I won't!"

"But I insist it shall be finished, and I will be obeyed, at any cost!"

A bright light flashed into Nan's eyes.

"I would obey you if you were reasonable in your demands," she says, quickly, "but you are not. You make life as hateful for us as you can, because my mother stands where you wished to."

Her speech is execrable in taste, and I see Madame grow very white.

"What do you mean?" she gasps, and goes nearer the culprit; and even our clever, daring sister shrinks under her wild and outraged look; but she contrives to say,—

"You know what I mean, and cannot deny it!"

Then, all in a minute, Madame lifts her lean hand, and strikes Nan so heavily across the cheek that she reels under the blow, and but for me would fall. Only in a moment she is erect, her face quite white save where the cruel fingers have left their impression. One look she gives at Madame, then tossing aside book and pen, says in a low voice, hard and determined despite its low notes,—

"I will never forgive you. I will never render you obedience any more;" but before

she ends madam has gone from the room, utterly cowed and vanquished.

"Oh, Nan!" I cry, "what possessed you to speak and act in such a fashion? Your life might be so much easier if you would but behave decently."

She looks at me scornfully.

"I am not so tame-spirited as some people, and I have had enough of Madame's nonsense. It is my turn now!"

"Nan, dear Nan!" I urge. "Don't do anything rash!"

"You need have no fear for me," coldly.

"And now, if you will allow me to pass, I will go to my own room. I can be quiet there!"

"Let me come with you, dear!"

"No; Madame might scold her model pupil. I wish to be alone!"

But by the evening her bitter mood has quite passed away. She does not dine with us; but when we go upstairs to her room we find her sitting very pale and still before the open window. She turns her head a little as we enter; and Cynthia, putting an arm about her, says, gently,—

"Poor little Nan! poor little Nan!" and all in a moment the pretty face is hidden in the small hands, and she is shaking with sobs.

"I can't help it!" she says, between deep breaths. "She makes me feel so dreadfully wicked. At times I could almost kill her. I know I'm a horrid little wretch, and often say the nastiest things to you both; but I love you—I love you. Oh! you will always remember that, whatever happens!"

"Yes, dear, yes!" says Cynthia, with a humorous smile. "We know there is a sweet kernel inside the bitter shell. And now let me get you to bed, or to-morrow you will suffer."

"I like best to sit here. It is so cool and quiet. Cynthia, Molly, kiss me, dears, and try to forget how stupid I have been. Oh, how my head aches!"

And, seeing she really wished it, we go to our respective rooms; but half the night I lie tossing to and fro, full of troubled thoughts of Nan. Then I fall asleep, and when I awake it is late—nearly ten; and Cynthia, white and scared, is standing by my bed, an open letter in her hand.

CHAPTER IV.

"What is it?" I ask, sitting erect. "What has happened?"

"It's Nan!" says Cynthia, and sinks into a chair. "She's gone—run away!"

"What!" and out of bed I jump. My sister looks as though she will faint, and only gasps out,—

"Read it," and offers the letter.

Snatching it from her I say, "Who brought this?"

"A boy! Nan met him at Stavelly, and paid his fare on here; but read it, Molly, and let us think what to do!"

"DEAR CYNTHY AND MOLLY.—When you kissed me to-night you did not guess what was in my mind, and I dared not tell you, because I was so sure you would stop me going. I can't stand this sort of life any longer, so I am going out to papa! I shall tell him all about Keith, and if you're only patient, Cynthia, you will soon be happy 'ever after,' like the princesses in the fairy tales. You must neither of you fret about me; I shall be quite safe. I have got enough money to take me to a friend, who I am sure will help me in my adventure. I hope I have given old Bozzy a scare this time. She deserves it. Now good-bye, my dears! I did not think how much I loved you until this parting told me the truth. I shall come back as soon as I can, for I've no intention of marrying any of the African princes, who of course, will beseege me with proposals.—Your loving NAN."

"What is to be done?" asks Cynthia, when I had finished this characteristic epistle.

"Where is the messenger?"

"Gone! Jane took the note in, but did not think to question him."

"And where did Nan get the money for this journey?"

"Oh, I wish I had known!" distressfully, "I have helped her to go. Only yesterday she came to me and borrowed a sovereign. I never thought of asking her why she wanted such a sum."

"Does Madame know?"

"Yes, and she is nearly frantic with fear. Molly, where can she be? We have not a single relative on this side of the globe; and we are acquainted with so few people that I am puzzled to know to whom she refers when she says, 'I have enough money to take me to a friend.'"

"Oh!" I cry, in sudden enlightenment, "she means Keith! Stavelly is on the way to Yarrowdale. Depend upon it she is with him."

"Do you think so?" doubtfully. "Shall we telegraph to him?"

"Yes, do! You must confess to Madame that you know where he is. But she won't stop to scold you now—she is too scared. Run down to the office, Cynthia, as quickly as you can, and I will meet you on the way back."

"Do I shall stay at Mrs. Chapman's until Keith's answer comes. I feel so guilty, as though I had aided and abetted the poor child in her flight."

"You are not so much to blame as I am," I say, disconsolately. "Nan told me some time since she should run away, and I ought to have remembered she always keeps her word."

"Poor little Nan!" and with that Cynthia hurries out, leaving her to make a rapid toilet. Going downstairs I encounter Madame, looking very worried and white.

"Did you know of this?" she demands.

"Tell me the truth, and quickly."

"No! Nan has often said she could not live any longer here, but I paid very little attention to her threats—she was always so quick-tempered."

Madame sinks into a chair.

"I shall go mad, with all this trouble. It matters little what I do. I am esteemed as nothing in the house; my labour of many years is wasted. Oh!" with a theatrical gesture, "I wish I had never seen this accursed place!"

I am naturally timid, but Nan's flight seems to give me that courage I have always lacked.

"Madame," I say, "do not you think the fault is yours in part? I know we are troublesome and disobedient, but if you had tried to win our hearts we might have been better. I am sure we should have loved you!"

And as I pause, in fear and trembling at my own boldness, she stretches out her hand to me, with the first and only gleam of tenderness I have ever seen in her.

"Molly, you are a good child, and like your father. Oh, what will he say to me, what think of me, if Nan is lost?"

"She shall be found," I say, moved to pity for her. "Even now I hope for the best. I think she has taken refuge with Mr. Calvert."

"What!" screamed Madame. "She would not so outrage all propriety!"

"She is too much a child to think of that," I answer. "And Keith will take good care of her. Now, if you will permit me, I will go to meet Cynthia."

As she offers no objection I go out, and down the road. I find my sister waiting impatiently for Keith's reply.

"What did you say?" I ask.

"Oh, just 'Is Nan with you?' One can't be explicit in a telegram."

How slowly the minutes wear by, and we can almost hear the beating of each other's heart, as we wait there in painful suspense. At last the reply comes.

"No; what do you mean? Is she missing?"

Cynthia bursts into tears.

"Perhaps she has destroyed herself," she sobs.

"Nonsense!" I answer, although there is

a great sick fear in my heart. "Nan would never do such a foolish and wicked thing! Cynthia, we must bear up as well as we can; and it is our duty to let Madame know the latest news. I left her in a terrible state."

"I hope she will be tortured!" says Cynthia, viciously. "She deserves it; but for her this never would have happened," and I cannot gainsay her.

All that day we wander like lost sheep about the house and grounds. Madame has discovered that Nan reached Stavelly safely; but at this place we lose all clue to her.

At night Cynthia says,—

"I shall sit up; perhaps Nan is doing this to frighten Madame, and she may return at any moment."

So we sit in dreary state in the drawing-room, the most silent trio imaginable; and quite late in the evening there comes a smart peal at the hall bell.

"Nan!" we girls cry, starting up, and even Madame looks eager.

But it is not the child, only a boy with a telegram; but oh! what relief it brings us! It is from Keith, and reads thus,—

"She has arrived; will bring her home to-morrow."

Cynthia catches me close to her breast.

"Molly! Molly! I am so glad. I can only cry!" and Madame, with a relieved look, says,—

"There is no necessity to sit up now. Suppose we go to bed."

And, just for this night, Cynthia and I are permitted to share one room.

Early in the morning we are astir, Cynthia dressed in her daintiest gown, and prettily flushed; her large, dark eyes are all aglow with love and excitement, for would she not see Keith to day?

Madame dispenses coffee with the iciest air; and breakfast being ended, says,—

"You understand, Cynthia, this will not alter my decision with regard to Mr. Calvert? I am quite ready to admit he is behaving very well, but I am not forgetful of his motive; neither can I overlook the fact that all this time you have been secretly corresponding with him."

"You left me no alternative," Cynthia says quietly. This morning nothing can greatly disturb her peace, for he is coming!

But I am afraid for Nan, and linger behind a moment to say to Madame (with what boldness I can assume),—

"You will not punish Nan; she is so young and headstrong, I am terrified to think what she may do if driven too far."

"Do you suppose for a moment, Molly, I can overlook this escapade?"

"I think you ought," I answer, gathering courage. "She must have suffered a great deal before taking such a step."

"Do you mean," in a low, hard voice, "that I have ill-treated her?"

"Madame, yes. All these years you have starved us of love, have made cowards of us, and done your best to kill whatever good there was in us. And if harm comes to Nan, what will my father say?"

She flushes crimson, and makes an angry gesture; but the next moment she turns to me with a piteous expression on her worn face.

"I can trust you—you are most like him. Molly, long ago, before your birth, before his marriage even, I loved your father, but he would not see it; he had no thought of me. I raged and rebelled against my fate, but where was the use? He married a beautiful doll, and all my good turned to evil then. I have hated you because you were her children, but I have done my duty by you, hard as it has been; and my reward is your dislike, your contempt. But I am not all bad; and for your sake—because you are most like your father, and are brave and unselfish—I promise you, I will not punish Nan in any way. Now leave me; I am sufficiently humiliated."

There is such shame, such pain in her eyes and on her face, that in a sudden burst of pity

for her I take one hand in mine, and kiss it once.

She starts aside a little; then, saying "Don't!" in a choked voice, averts her face; but, as I leave her, I see there are tears in her eyes.

Towards the close of the hot afternoon two familiar figures may be seen coming up the garden path, but when Cynthia and I would run to meet them, Madame sternly forbids us.

"No," she says. "I have given my word not to punish your sister, but I will not permit her to be welcomed as an honoured guest. Remain here!"

So there we sat, waiting with what patience we can; and presently Keith is ushered in, followed by Nan, who wears a most sullen expression.

Of course, his first look is for Cynthia, who, blushing and advancing, offers her hand; and then, in the face of us all, this audacious young man stoops and kisses her upon the mouth!

Madame looks daggers, but as he turns to her controls herself sufficiently to say,—

"We have to thank you, sir, for restoring this rebellious and intractable child to us! She, perhaps, esteems it a light matter to leave her sisters a prey to anxiety and fear—we regard her conduct in another way. May I ask where she joined you?"

"At Yarrowdale. I beg, Madame, you will not deal harshly with her. I am quite sure she is sorry for the trick she has played."

"Her repentance is open to doubt. She certainly has an air of anger rather than sorrow."

"I am not sorry!" Nan announces, in her most uncompromising tone. "And even to save myself punishment I will not say I am!"

"Nan, dear," I whisper, "Madame has promised to let you go free."

She opens her eyes to their widest extent, and, I am sorry to say, gives vent to an incredulous whistle; but, before Madame can utter a word of reproof, she breaks out,—

"I want you all to understand that what I have done I shall do again if an occasion arises; but I shall be wiser than to go to him!" pointing a disdainful finger at Keith. "I consider him the meanest young man I know. I would die rather than betray a friend who trusted me as I did him!"

"It was for your good, dear!" Cynthia urges; but Nan replies with a look of ineffable scorn.

"You will dine with us, Mr. Calvert?" Madame says, with cold courtesy. "But you must also understand that your conduct in this unfortunate affair does not alter your position with regard to Cynthia."

"I did not suppose it would, Madame; and I am quite willing to wait Mr. Kirby's reply. I think (with a mischievous smile) my antecedents will bear inspection."

That silly Nan refuses to remain with us this evening, and goes to her own room, where she sits in sulky state until Cynthia and I join her on our way to bed.

"Dear old Nan!" says Cynthia, nestling close to her. "I can freely forgive you all the trouble you gave us, because you brought Keith back to me!"

"I'm glad he goes to-morrow!" Nan answers, viciously. "He's a sneak!"

"Nan, how vulgar you are! And, really, Keith treated you much better than you deserved."

"I wish you wouldn't preach, Molly! It's a bad habit you've got. What a pity you weren't born a boy; you might have followed in papa's footsteps."

"I could not do better, though you do pretend to sneer at him."

"Now, don't quarrel, girls! I am dying to hear Nan's adventures! Please begin at the beginning."

But Nan needs a great deal of persuasion first. It is only by Cynthia's adroit management that we hear the history of her escapade.

"I couldn't bear Madame's nonsense any longer," she begins, abruptly, "and I made up my mind to run away. I thought Mr. Calvert

would be glad to have me with him, because we could talk together of Cynthia. And, as he has no relations, I fancied he might feel lonely; so I got out of my window when you were all asleep, and crawled down the stairs. Then I jumped, and hurt my ankle a little. I thought I must have shrieked out, but I had just sense enough not to do so. It was quite light, and I walked to Stately, stopping all night in the waiting-room. A guard took me there, and was kind to me. (I didn't tell him I had run away from home.) There I wrote my letter, and in the morning I gave it to a boy on the platform, paying his fare both ways, and giving him sixpence besides. Then I went to Yarrowdale.

CHAPTER V.

"It was seven o'clock when I reached the house where Mr. Calvert was staying; and when I asked for him the woman took me upstairs to a room where he was sitting with a friend. They were both smoking, and Keith looked as happy as though he had not 'left his girl behind him.'"

"He sprang up when I went in and shouted, 'Nan!' and then he grew white as death. 'What has happened? Is Cynthia ill? Tell me at once!'"

"I didn't quite approve his manner, so I sat down and smoothed out my dress before I said, 'Cynthia is all right, and quite happy, although you aren't with her.'"

"You horrid little wretch! I—"

"Don't interrupt me please, or I shall never get done. Well, satisfied of your well being, he asked me next what lucky wind had blown me his way. When I found he meant to be civil of course I grew cordial, and I said 'Madame struck me, so I ran away.'"

"The gentleman with him burst out laughing. I longed to box his ears. Now I am glad I did not do it, for although he hasn't many manners he is very good-hearted. Keith called him Moretown. Well, when they had grown quiet again they asked me to tell them all about it; and Mr. Moretown said Madame was a beast and I was a brick, and slapped me across the shoulder rather harder than he need have done. I thought then Keith didn't look as pleased as he should at my confidence in him."

"What do you intend doing now?" he asked, and I said, 'why, staying with you, of course!'"

"Well, for cool impudence recommend me to Nan," I say, with a shout of laughter.

"I fail to see any reason for such vulgar mirth," she retorts austere; "and if I am not allowed to tell my story in my own way, I won't tell it at all. Mr. Moretown again laughed and Keith was even noisier than he, but presently he said, 'Nan, dear (what a Judas Iscariot he is), I'm afraid that isn't feasible, and just think how your sisters will worry themselves ill over you.'"

"We can let them know where I am," I said. "I shall be company for you."

"But don't you see," he answered, 'that isn't possible. Young ladies cannot go wandering all over the country with men who are not related to them.'"

"Then I got up in a temper. 'Very well,' I said, 'I don't wish to force myself upon you, so I will go away. I have helped you often, and I thought you were not ungrateful,' then I walked to the door, and he followed me, smiling as though it were a good joke."

"You silly child," he said, "I only want to do the best for you. Come back and listen to reason; and when I would not listen to him, he took me up in his arms and carried me to the sofa. Then all at once he showed himself in his true colours; for he said, quite sternly, 'You must hear me, and do as I tell you. Don't you know, you foolish girl, if you allow your temper (my temper!) to carry you away in this fashion you will do something one day which you will repent all your life?'"

"A very sensible speech too," I remark, sotto voce, but Nan will not hear.

"I shall take you back to your friends," he went on; "but I shall also write to your father as to Madame Bosanquet's conduct (that was his way of getting out of the bother) and in all things I will try to serve you."

"But there, give me actions, and not words, I said I would not come home, and just as I was getting furious Mr. Moretown called out,—

"Let the little beggar stay, Keith, and we will take her to the theatre this evening. It will be time enough to talk over plans when we come home, and this afternoon we will have a row unless Miss Nan is afraid of the sea."

"I must say we enjoyed ourselves immensely, only Keith would persist in looking cross (he called it grave), but Mr. Moretown was the best of company. And shall I ever forget that evening at the theatre. It was 'Sophia' we saw, and I laughed and cried until I was quite ashamed of myself. Afterwards we had such a dainty little supper, and then Keith gave me into his landlady's care. If I had had a chance I should have run away again, but I was watched too closely. So here I am, back again, like a bad penny."

"And I see no sign of repentance in you," says Cynthia, with mock severity; "and it appears to me that your time of absence was filled with nothing but pleasure!"

"You seem to fancy I had no anxiety about you!" Nan says, haughtily. "Very few sisters would have risked what I did for your sakes. But, there, a prophet is not without honour save in his own country, and among his own people. Well, I for one am asleep, so we will postpone any further discussion until to-morrow. I say, Cynthia, was Boszy awfully scared?"

"She was frantic!"

"I should like to have kept her in suspense for weeks. Good-night, girls!"

"I am going to stay with you! Madame has given me permission to share your room," I say innocently, but Nan flashes angrily upon me.

"So you are to play the part of spy or gaoler, which? I dare say either will be congenial to you."

It is very rarely that Cynthia speaks any pleasant words; but now, advancing quickly, she lay her hands on Nan's shoulders, and says quite sternly,—

"How dare you talk like that to Molly? She is the best of the bunch, and you shall not insult her! You are not fit to be trusted by yourself, so that Molly has kindly consented to take charge of you—and this is how you repay her!"

Nan first looks sullen and then ashamed, and finally bursts into tears of contrition, as she kisses me warmly.

"You dear, plain, old darling! It seems as though Providence has given you all the sense and goodness, whilst we've got nothing but beauty (the vain young puss). There, take this easy chair, and make yourself at home! After all, I think I shall like this arrangement best."

She drops back very easily into her old place in the household, and Madame wisely refrains from referring even remotely to her escapade; but Cynthia and I notice Nan is very proud of it, and assumes such grandiose airs, poses so persistently as a heroine, that we find a fund of amusement in her.

Of course in a village like ours everything is known to everyone, and it is certain that Nan is regarded by outsiders as a clever and wonderful young lady, and I overheard the cook say to the butcher's man,—

"Ah! Miss Cynthia's lovely, and Miss Molly's a decent little body, but give me Miss Nan! She's as mischievous as a kitten, but I glory in her courage. Why, I don't think she's afraid of anything."

"She's a smart body!" he answers. "Law, how the misses and me laughed when we heard the trick she had played Madame! Bless the child's pretty face!"

Conscious of her proud position, Nan

carries her head high, and assumes an air of protectorship which upsets our gravity continually, and brings a frown to Madame's brow.

We are all anxiously waiting for papa's reply to Keith, and until it comes our young lovers still correspond secretly; but as Nan refuses to have anything more to do with the matter I am pressed into their service. And so the time wears by slowly enough, and another year comes. It is in early January that the African mail reaches us, and there is a letter to each of us from mamma, one from papa to Madame, and another to Cynthia.

With trembling fingers she tears it open, and, watching her furtively, I see her lovely face flush and pale alternately, and the red lips set themselves in a hard line. But having read it, she carefully and deliberately folds it, and makes a pretence of eating her breakfast. Madame looks elate, but does not condescend to impart any news to us, and it is with considerable impatience we wait for the meal to end.

Once in the schoolroom, with an hour of leisure before us,—

"What does he say?" I cry. "Make haste, make haste Cynthia, and tell us."

"Bless you, my children, bless you! May you live long and die happy!" remarks Nan, daintily, but Cynthia does not smile.

"Listen," she says, and reads slowly,—

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER,—

"It was with surprise and some sorrow I heard of your entanglement from Madame Buanquet and Mr. Calvert. You are very young yet to think of love or lovers, and as Mr. Calvert is suspiciously reticent as to his family and position, I must refuse to countenance any engagement between you at present! I am writing by this mail to him, and I put him on his honour neither to see nor correspond with you in future, save to communicate to you the substance of my letter to him. I hope to be with you all in August next, when I will grant him an interview; and should he answer all inquiries concerning himself and family satisfactorily I will offer no further objections to your engagement. Until then, remember I trust to your affection and daughterly obedience to act according to my wishes, and I think you will not abuse my trust. Your mother's failing health necessitates our return from this glorious harvest-field, and your unknown sister and brother require a cooler, healthier climate; but it grieves me that I must relinquish my work here; still it is the will of Heaven, and I must not complain.

"I can only add, 'Possess your soul with patience,' and all will yet be well with you. And remember always, my dear child, there is a love higher than earthly love, deeper, stronger, fuller, and learn to lean upon that thought. Commending you to the care of Heaven, I remain always,

"Your loving father,

"HENRY KIRBY."

Nan snatches the letter from her.

"What a nice mixture of worldliness and religion!" she cries. "You call him a dreamer and an enthusiast! I say he is a very wide-awake young man; and though I haven't half forgiven Keith for his mean conduct, I don't approve of our respected father's doubts. Cynthia, you never mean to obey him?"

"I must—he trusts me; but it is very hard," and her lovely head droops low, the tears fall slowly down her pale cheeks; and filled with anger (because she is my favourite sister), I say, "He has left us so long that we can expect very little love or submission; and (this jealousy) no doubt Celia and Andrew are dearer to him than ever we were, or shall be. You see they are with him always, whilst we are nothing but aliens. Cynthia, it is too hard for you, too bad for Keith!"

"If Keith had a grain of sense, or a bit of courage, he would marry her right off."

"Hush Nan, you know nothing about it. We must wait until we hear from him."

"And do you mean to say you won't even correspond with him?"

"I am a minor," bitterly. "I cannot please myself unless I endanger Keith's safety."

"Look here, Cynthia," says Nan quickly, "I'll do anything I can for you, and I think, under the circumstances, I will make friends with Keith. You may count upon my support."

Cynthia laughs hysterically. "Thank you, Nan; but I'm afraid it isn't worth much."

Then Madame entering, all further conversation is stopped; but at the close of the lessons, which even Cynthia shares, she says,—

"What do you intend doing in this matter?"

"My father leaves me no alternative, Madame. I shall obey him."

"I am glad you have formed so sensible a decision," and she sweeps from the room.

The next day a letter arrives from Keith, or rather a note. Cynthia gives it into my hands, saying there is nothing which I may not read.

"MY DEAR SWEETHEART,—By this time you have learned your father's decision. It is alike cruel and unjust; but he is your parent, and it does not become me to say more. He has put me on my honour not to see or communicate with you after this, but I hold I am entitled to one meeting with you (according to his wording), and so shall be with you to-morrow. Meet me at the end of the Perton Woods, and bring Molly with you as a protection against the 'adventurer' who dares to address you in the language of love. Keep a brave heart, darling; I shall claim you yet.—Your devoted

"KEITH."

"Of course you will go," I say; "but it seems unfair to you that I should form one of the party."

"No; come with me Molly, dear. I—I am half afraid of myself. But how can I let him go without good-bye, perhaps believing I had failed him—I who love him more than all the world beside. And, Molly, it does me good to have you near me; you are so strong and wise."

"What a comfort it is to hear you say so," I remark dryly. "I had need have strength and wisdom, being minus grace and beauty."

"Oh, you should not lay Nan's words to heart. She does not mean half she says."

"Yes, I do," Nan retorts, with decision; "and it is nonsense to pretend Molly is pretty, because she isn't, although she has very good eyes. But you silly old thing, don't you know that you're the kindest and best of sisters, and have all the virtues under the sun? Cynthia and I would be lost without you!"

"Thank you," ironically. "I don't much care about flattery," and then Mistress Nan shakes me heartily, kisses me once in a resonant way, and pushes me into an easy chair (Madame's) saying,—

"You wise old thing, I wonder who here flatters you? Why, you're as austere as Diana, as invulnerable as—as—"

"If you please, Miss Nan, you're wanted. Little Tommy Wright says you promised him a ball, and he was to wait for it."

"Bless the child! What a memory he has! Very well, Mary. I will be down directly," and as the door closes on our neat maid, she turns to us with uplifted hands, "I shall surely come to beggary; half my allowance is gone already for 'gimoracks' and toys for these village youngsters. But you see, unlike you, my dears, I have a reputation to keep up, and I can't afford to lose my prestige!"

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN we reach the confines of Perton Wood we find Keith already there, and seeing us he comes forward with a rush.

Cynthia does not speak. She only stretches

out her hands to him, and lifts her lovely anguished eyes to his excited face; and all careless of my presence, he snatches her close to his breast, and kisses the sweet mouth madly.

Of course I discreetly look away from them, and I am free to confess I wish any other person had been chosen to play propriety.

Keith speaks in a low voice, but his words reach me very distinctly where I stand.

"It seems in our case, sweetheart, the old proverb is to be verified, for the course of our love is very far from running smoothly. When I got that letter I—well, I'm afraid I swore. It was not exactly the sort a man of spirit likes to receive. Cynthia, darling, is there no way out of our difficulty? Do you never think of my proposal to take matters into our own hands?"

"I have thought of it often, dear Keith; but my father's letters make such a course more than ever impossible. He trusts to our honour!"

"I thought that was a commodity an adventurer did not possess."

"You must not speak so bitterly, Keith. Remember this is as hard for me as for you!"

"Harder, you poor girl!" remorsefully, "and I am going to test your faith in me still further. It is true, my dear, that I have a secret carefully hidden from you, which you shall know on the morning which makes you my wife. But there is nothing disgraceful in it, and I have an excellent motive for holding it fast. You are not afraid to trust me?"

"Not oh, no! I should have been glad to know that Madame's suspicions and papa's caution were things of the past; but I will ask nothing, seek to know nothing, until you choose to tell me all the truth."

"My dear! my dear! I knew you would not fail me. But, Cynthia, how shall we pass the terrible months which must elapse before we meet or correspond again?"

"I cannot tell; but whatever happens, whatever opposition I may experience, I will not fail you; and in three years I shall be twenty-one!"

"Three years!" dolefully. "Why don't you say an eternity? And who knows what may happen in all those thirty-six long months?"

"We must hope for the best; and there is always something a man may do. You are not envired as we poor women with forms of etiquette and stupid observances. You can go out into the world and find work. Keith, are you idle all your days? Cannot you find some exercise for your talents and energy?"

He flashes crimson.

"There is work I could do, but I have long neglected it. It will be hard to make a beginning; but for your sake I will do it."

She lifts herself to his level, and kisses him once tenderly.

"You are not angry with me that I presume to speak of your duty to you?"

"Angry! my darling, no! It is such women as you who are the salvation of men. And now, Cynthia, there is no recognised engagement between us; but I should like to think you wear some gift of mine, and that, whenever you look at it, you will remember the giver, and pray for our speedy reunion," and with this he slips a ring upon her finger. It is set with rubies, which flash blood-red under the chilly sunshine.

"You will wear it always?"

"Always, although it is so beautiful it must attract attention. But what shall I give you in exchange, Keith? You must have a charm against doubt and despondency," and with a sudden gesture she removes a tiny silver Maltese cross from her watch-chain.

"It is of very little value," she says, simply, "but it was my mother's, and I have always loved it for her sake."

"As I shall for yours! And now, dear, the time has come for us to say good-bye. I must not risk meeting you again, and the last train leaves here at 4.45. I have not much time to spare. Cynthia, my dear, my dear! let no one

tempt you from your allegiance to me, let nothing ever come between us, or mar our love!"

With her white face all stained with tears, her lovely eyes dim with weeping, she clings about him.

"I will never leave you, nor forsake you!" she says, in the words of Holy Writ; and I, feeling this parting is too sacred for other eyes to witness, other ears to hear, walk a considerable distance from them; and after a long, long time Keith brings her to me.

"Take care of her, Molly," he says. "I leave her in your hands. Be good to her, for my sake!"

"You may trust me," I answer, quietly. "I love her too well to be neglectful of her," and I put my arm about my weeping sister.

"Good-bye," she whispers, brokenly; "good-bye. May Heaven bless and keep you and bring you back to me. Go now whilst I can bear the parting."

Without another word he turns, and leaves us standing there; and Cynthia watches him go with streaming eyes, and when she can see him no longer says,—

"Let us go home, Molly. I feel as though we shall never meet again, and my heart is broken, my heart is broken!"

Without another word we retrace our steps. I silent through utter stupidity, not knowing in any way how to comfort her. Nan meets us on the stairs.

"Has he gone?" she asks, and as I reply in the affirmative retorts, "The more fool he. I would not have gone without Cynthia even if I had had to carry her off by sheer force. But young men are not what they used to be. Cynthia, what a fright you've made of yourself!"

"Nan, are you quite heartless?" I ask, angrily. "Let Cynthia pass. She is not in the mood for badinage or scoffs!"

"Hoity-toity! Molly on stilts! This is the eighth wonder of the world!" and she runs off lightly laughing, whilst I go with Cynthia to her door. There we paused, and she says gently,—

"Leave me here, dear. I would rather be alone," and kissing me goes in, leaving me no time for remonstrance.

The next day she is her own lovely self, but paler and quieter than before, and there are deep shadows in the beautiful violet eyes. Sometimes I see Madame watching her with a gleam of malicious triumph in her black eyes, but I do not think my sister is conscious of this observance. I fancy at this time all her thoughts are of Keith, all her heart absorbed in him.

Spring, cold and wet, comes at last, and in passing gives way to an unusually hot summer. All the little brooks are dry, and even our river is so shallow that one might safely wade through it at any point.

Of drainage our village is absolutely innocent, so that there is small wonder that towards the end of June fever breaks out in our midst.

Our house is so far from the village itself that we have little fear of infection, and beyond forbidding us to visit any of the cottagers, Madame takes no further precautions. But when, one by one, the poor people are stricken down, and not a day passes when the death-bell does not toll out its solemn dirge, she begins to show symptoms of alarm; and one morning over the breakfast table suggests that we shall all move to a quiet little place, eight miles distant, until the fever subsides.

Of course we all agree, and Nan is in a state of great excitement, and breakfast being ended runs off to overhaul her wardrobe, over which she makes many disparaging remarks.

"She dresses me like a child!" she says, angrily, "and I am quite as much a woman as any of you. My gowns are all short in the skirt and waist. I look a perfect fright!"

"You grow so quickly," I remark, pacifi-

"Oh, yes, I know you always find some

excuse for Madame. It is my firm belief you would plead extenuating circumstances for monsters like Nero and Madame Brinvillier's. I'm afraid your moral tone is unhealthy."

Our packing proceeds but slowly, owing to continual interruptions, but as we are not leaving home for three days this does not so much matter. Madame has secured good lodgings, and the servants are to be sent to their respective homes, with the exception of Jane who accompanies us—Nan stoutly declares in the capacity of spy. So the third evening comes; and, tired with our unwarmed exertions we sit in Cynthia's room drinking tea.

"Oh, dear," says Nan, "how glad I shall be to get away from this dismal place! I declare these constantly recurring funerals make me quite melancholy!"

"And I shall be glad to breathe fresh air," adds Cynthia. "I have felt so faint and languid of late, and to-day my head is like a furnace for heat."

I look at her startled.

"Don't you think, dear, it would be wise to lie down and rest? You are so flushed, and your eyes are so heavy."

She leans forward suddenly. "Molly, do you remember I said 'I feared Keith and I would never meet again'? It must have been a presentiment. Girls! girls! the fever is on me, and it is generally fatal."

"Oh, Cynthia! Cynthia!" cries Nan, with a burst of tears. "Don't talk like that! You are only over-tired. You will be all right in the morning!"

But such a great dread fills my heart that I can find no word to say; but sit, holding the small hot hands in mine, and wondering vaguely what I shall do if Cynthia is taken from us. And she goes on,—

"I feel so stupid, and everything seems slipping from my memory. Let me say what I wish now, for if I am ill, and should never recover consciousness, I would not like to leave you all without a word of love and farewell. You must tell Keith that so long as I was sensible I thought of him, and held him dearer each passing day, and—"

Her faint voice dies suddenly out, her golden head falls heavily upon my shoulder.

"Fetch Madame," I say, under my breath. "I am afraid she is going to be very ill."

Madame comes with all speed, and looking down on the flushed face, mutters,—

"It is the fever. Nan, send Jane for Doctor Bradbury; there is no time to lose, and to-morrow you girls must leave home. I trust to you, Molly, not to get into mischief."

"Our place is here with our sister," I say. "Madame, we cannot leave her. Rather let us share the nursing. Oh! I should never forgive myself if I left her to fight through this alone!"

"I must consult Doctor Bradbury before I give any definite answer," and, as I am a favourite with our medical man, I have small doubt of winning his consent to my proposal.

How anxiously I listen for the first fall of his step in the verandah, and running down, I meet him with outstretched hands.

"Doctor, you must help me! Madame wishes to send us away, and it will break my heart to go. Give me leave to stay and nurse my sister."

"Are you strong enough?" he asks, gravely. "And are you in the least afraid of infection?"

"I never had a day's illness in my life, and I have no fear for myself."

"Then I think we may say yes to your entreaty. Now take me to Miss Cynthia."

Madame and Jane have already laid her in her white bed; and as the doctor bends over her, he says,—

"Yes; it is the fever, and she is likely to have a bad time. But I think you may safely allow her sisters to remain with her, as they wish it; and Miss Molly will, I am sure, prove your right hand."

To-night Madame and I keep watch over the sufferer. At first she is very restless, but finally falls into a heavy slumber; and I, being weary with the labours of the past three days, am beginning to doze, when, suddenly, a voice sings, shrilly,—

"Never to meet again, love! Never until we die!"

and there is Cynthia, sitting erect, with flushed cheeks, and wild, wandering eyes.

Instantly Madame rises, and, with gentle force, lays her back upon her pillows, holding her there with strong, sinewy hands.

But to-night we spend an awful time. All through the dark hours our poor girl alternately laments and entreals for Keith; uttering piteous reproaches against those who have come between her and her love, and occasionally breaking into still more piteous songs.

Even Madame is moved, and I know by the nervous play of the muscles about her mouth that she is terribly afraid for Cynthia.

As the first grey streak of light shows in the sky Doctor Bradbury comes again.

"I could not rest," he says, simply. "I am very anxious about this poor child."

"Keith! Keith! Keith!" cries my sister. "Oh! give him back to me!"

"Who is this man for whom she asks so persistently?"

"Her lover; but Mr. Kirby declines to receive him into the family until he is assured of his position and respectability."

"You must send for him. If she has any chance of recovery it lies in his coming."

"I do not know where to find him. Molly, have you any idea of his present locality?" Madame questions, anxiously.

"No!" I answer, bitterly. "Both you and my father forbade any correspondence between them until August; and for aught either of you care, Cynthia may die unhealed. I hope you will both be properly proud of your work."

Even in my anger and my pain I am conscious of the doctor's surprise at my outbreak. I am usually so meek that, in her teasing moods Nan calls me Griseida.

Madame says nothing, but I think her conscience is already reproaching her, and I am wicked enough to feel glad.

Doctor Bradbury stays with us three hours, and, promising to return as quickly as possible goes out of the room. I following.

"Tell me," I say, in a low, hard voice. "Is there any hope?"

"Very little; unless you can find and bring her lover here. But I will do my utmost."

"I know you will!" and I toil wearily up again.

CHAPTER VII.

"How stupid you all are!" cries Nan, with tears in her pretty eyes. "You haven't a grain of sense among you. Of course Keith must be found, and it won't be hard to find him either. We must advertise for him. Give me pen and paper, and I will soon write you out a copy," and she is as good as her word. This is her advertisement.

"Should this meet the eye of Keith Calvert, he is requested to come to Stonecourt without delay, as C — is dangerously ill."

We lose no time in despatching drafts of this to the various dailies, and then try to wait patiently for an answer, or, still better, the sight of Keith's handsome face.

The day wears heavily by, and the delirium seems momentarily to increase, and hope is almost dead within us. Then comes night—the dreadful night—when a stupor falls upon Cynthia, and the flush dying from her face leaves her ghastly white, like some beautiful statue. She is so still she scarcely seems to breathe; and at times we watchers, grasping each other's hands, lean over her in agonised fear lest she has passed away for ever.

Morning comes at last, with its myriad sweet scents and sounds, its glory of light and

life; and Nan, who has slept a little during the night, begs me to take some rest.

"It's of no use overworking yourself," she says, wisely. "You will break down next, and what we should do with two invalids on our hands I cannot think!" And acknowledging the wisdom of her words I go to my room, there to snatch a few hours of restless sleep.

When I wake it is noon, and the sun is shining hotly down upon the roof, making the upper rooms almost intolerable.

Faint and weary I go down, and walk to and fro along the verandah, wondering what will be the end of our trouble, and praying Heaven that if one of us must be taken it may be me, not Cynthia, who has all things to make life goodly and glad.

A swift step along the gravel startles me, and, turning, I see a hurrying figure—Keith's. But can that white, haggard face, those miserable, despairing eyes be his? I stretch out my hands to him with a wild cry.

"You have come at last?" I say; and grasping my fingers in a painful grasp, he gasps—

"Am—I—too—late?"

"I hope not, I pray not. She is just alive and no more."

"Then why are you not with her? Why did you not advertise for me before?"

"I have been getting a little needful rest; and her illness was so sudden we had no earlier chance, and we did not know where to find you."

"I left her in your care," he says, with bitter unreason, "and you have neglected your charge. I thought I could trust you."

"I am not able to stave off illness," I answer, meekly, too sorry for him to be angry; "but I wish, with all my heart, it was I and not Cynthia lying at death's door. No one would miss me."

In an instant his manner changes.

"Poor little Molly! I was a brute to speak like that. But you are such a good soul that everyone imposes upon you. Forgive me, dear. I am so wretched that I am scarcely answerable for my words or actions. If it had not been for Moretown I should not have seen your message. I never read the 'agony columns,' and it was only by chance that he fell across it. Now, Molly, take me to her at once; every moment is precious."

"You must be prepared for a great change," I say, sorrowfully. "She will not know you. She has lain in a stupor a day and a night."

He catches his breath quickly, but makes no response, and in silence we make our way to the sick room.

Madame looks up as we enter, and a relieved expression crosses her face.

"You have come! Heaven grant you may save her yet!"

Without a word he goes forward, and, standing by the bed, looks down on that white and wasted face, the silent, rigid form. Then suddenly falling on his knees, hides his tortured face in the coverlet; and we, stealing out, leave him alone with Cynthia and his anguish.

When, at length, we venture to return, he is sitting beside her, apparently calm, holding one thin hand in his, and watching her with such love and yearning in his dark eyes that involuntarily the tears rise to my own.

For the rest of to-day he and I watch together, but at night Madame insists Keith shall take some rest in an adjoining room; and after a great deal of persuasion he agrees, on condition that at the slightest change in Cynthia's condition we will call him.

But through the long night there is no alteration in her, and once or twice Nan whispers heartbrokenly—

"Molly, Molly! can you hear her breathe?"

Then, just as day is breaking I feel a slight stir in the bed, and gradually Cynthia's eyes are opening upon us.

"Run, Nan," I say, "and fetch Keith!" and she needs no second bidding. The weary

golden head, shorn now of its heavy locks, moves restlessly upon the pillows.

"Cynthia," I whisper, "Do you know me, darling?"

"Yes" comes the faintest whisper. "You are Molly! Am I going to die?"

"No, no, no!" I begin vehemently, then check myself, remembering the necessity for calm. "Dearest, you have been terribly ill, but we hope now for the best. Do you think you could bear to see Keith now?"

Ah! the sudden light on that wan face; it answers better than words.

"He is here, and waiting now to see you! May he come in?"

"Yes, yes," and as she speaks the door opens, and there stands her lover. She tries to stretch out feeble, welcoming hands, vainly endeavours to utter his name, as with a low cry he springs forward; and the next moment he has her up in his arms, held fast and close to the heart which has no thought for any save her; and we, feeling such a meeting is sacred, steal out and leave them there together.

She had been very near death's door, but from the time of Keith's arrival she begins to mend, and Nan, recovering her old vivacity, calls him irreverently the "Novel Tonic." In a fortnight Cynthia is able to sit up.

"And now," she says, "as I am improving in health, Madame will send you away again; and I am wondering how I shall bear to lose you, having had you with me for such a long and blessed time."

"I shall not go," Keith announces stonily. "And I have come prepared to prove my respectability! It is time all this mystery was cleared up. I am ashamed that I should ever have thought it necessary to put you to the test."

"The test, Keith! What do you mean?"

"I deserve you should be angry with me; but I hope you will see I had some shadow of excuse for my conduct. Cynthia, my darling, I have been sailing under false colours too long!"

"This gets interesting," says Nan, our irrepressible. "Pray go on, Keith, and make full confession of your crimes."

"The fact is," began Keith, not heeding her interruption, "all this while I have been masquerading; in other words, using a name to which I have no claim! I am Keith Madox, Lord Whitehouse—"

"Oh!" from Nan, but profound silence on Cynthia's part and mine.

"I only came into the title two years ago, and through the death of my only brother, Burrows Madox. I cannot speak calmly of him yet, poor fellow, for his end was tragic, and his ruin was wrought by the woman he loved."

"She was the only child of a penniless gentleman, and beautiful beyond description. Burrows met her at Boulogne, and she used every art of which she was mistress to bring him to her feet. This was not difficult. He was a susceptible young fellow, and no match for her. In a little while he was her devoted slave, and shortly he wrote me he was the happiest man in all the world, for Ciris Desbrow had promised to marry him."

"No time was lost in preparing the wedding finery; in fact, I had only time to scamper over from New York (where I then was) to officiate as groomsman. Burrows had certainly not praised his betrothed too highly; she was superbly beautiful in a strange fashion, which reminded me somewhat unpleasantly of the 'Serpent of the Nile,' and other women of that ilk. She was gracious to me, but I continued distrustful of her; and I believe she guessed this, for later on she did her best to prejudice Burrows against me, and for awhile she succeeded."

"Well, they were married, and as Lady Whitehouse had a passion for travel he took her to India, and we did not meet again for six months. Then I came upon them in London, and the change in my brother fairly

staggered me. He looked years older, and his honest face bore evident marks of dissipation.

"I questioned him as to the change, I saw, but he answered pettishly, and I let the subject drop. But I very soon knew the cause. My lady's flagrant flirtations, and openly expressed partiality for an old lover, were soon the favourite themes for drawing-room gossip, and it was said all Burrows' threats and entreaties were treated with insolent contempt by her."

"Things went from bad to worse, until this ill-assorted couple had been married a year; and then, one night, Burrows came to me, and it ever a man was mad with shame and grief he was."

"I asked him what had happened. At first he could not tell me; but when he had grown a little quieter he said that life was practically over with him; that only that night Ciris had told him she never loved him, and now she loathed him because he stood between her and the fellow she condescended to favour; that but for his rank and wealth she would never have married him."

"There was worse, far worse, to tell, but he was loyally silent. He would not proclaim her shame to the world, or put her away. Rather he preferred death for himself."

"When he left me (going by his own earnest entreaty alone) he went back to his ruined home, and shot himself."

"He had kept her guilty secret, but by some chance the whole story leaked out, and she stood confessed as a faithless wife, a woman beyond the pale of mercy or pity."

"A merciful jury brought in a verdict of 'suicide whilst temporarily insane,' and Burrows was buried with our parents. But his tragic end made a profound impression on me; and I vowed, if ever I married, my wife should remain in ignorance of my true position until I had tested her love beyond doubt. Cynthia, can you forgive me?"

"I forgive you freely; but I wish you had known me true!" she answers, distressfully. "Keith, I believed in you as the good believe in Heaven, although, indeed, your whole life seemed surrounded by mystery."

"I am heartily ashamed of myself for any doubts I may have had; but, remember, I had terrible cause to be wary."

"Say no more, Keith; we will forget all that is gone, and be happy in the present," and her sweet pale face flashes as she turns to him.

"I think we are rather de trop," Nan remarks, very audibly. "Suppose we make tracks, Molly, as dear brother Jonathan would say?"

A letter from Keith's solicitor having proved his identity beyond dispute, Madame, of course, raises no objection to his frequent visits, and Cynthia is in the seventh heaven of delight.

Then comes a day when all is excitement throughout the house, for our parents are expected.

Madame drives to meet them, leaving us to array ourselves under the verandah.

She has steadfastly declined Nan's offer to accompany her. I fancy she is anxious to explain Keith's altered position to them, and the grand alliance Cynthia is now to make.

So we wait as patiently as we can for their coming, and soon the sounds of returning wheels warns us they are near.

In a few moments we see papa spring out and assist mamma to alight.

She runs towards us, and then there follows such a multitude of kisses, such a babel of voices, that I am bewildered and dazed.

When I have time to notice anything clearly I find that Celia is a very pretty, dark-eyed child of nine, and that Andrew is her exact antipodes—a white-haired, white-lashed, plain little fellow of seven, with a sullen brow and peevish mouth; but I think I am prepared to love them both, if only they will let me.

Cynthia is married with great *éclat*, and after she is gone the house seems so quiet and desolate that the two girls cling the closer to each other, and Nan openly expresses her dissatisfaction at the state of affairs. We had hoped so much from mamma and papa, and are miserably disappointed. They are very, very kind to us, but it is easy to see that Celia and Andrew are more to them than we can ever be. Perhaps it is natural, because they have been always with them, but it is none the less hard to bear.

And when, a little later, Cynthia invites us to Whitehouse, we are only too glad to go. There Nan completes her conquest of Mr. Moretown, who is the younger son of General Moretown, and well provided for. So Nan, too, marries, and begins her brilliant, happy life, whilst I am left alone.

It is very sad for me then; but the time of my loneliness does not last long. One day Dr. Bradbury comes to me.

"My dear," he says, with that grave gentleness which always marks his manner to me, "my dear, I am many years older than you, but I believe I can make you happy! Do you love me well enough to marry me?"

And I, scarce believing the evidence of my own senses, stretch my hands gladly to him. "I love you more than all the world!" I cry, and then can find no other word to say.

"Just the very match for Molly," says Nan, laughing. "Plenty of folks to look after, an elderly husband to cosset, and plenty of work to do mixing medicines. It is to be hoped she won't poison any of her lord's patients!"

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

TOM: "Before you were married did your wife—" DIK: "I did not have any wife before I was married."

SOME of the domestic seem to imagine that coffee, like some kinds of medicines, should be well shaken before taken.

It is those who haven't had la grippe that crack jokes about it. Those who have can't see where the laugh comes in.

PARENT: "What made you accept that young Snobs?" DAUGHTER: "I was afraid that he might go farther, and fare worse."

"GOLLY!" gasped little Johnny as he finished the second crook of stolen preserves, "I feel as if I had been smoking pa's pipe."

AN OLD FRIEND.—Amateur Humorist: "That's a pretty good joke, now, isn't it?" WEARY EDITOR: "I used to think so ten years ago."

SENTIMENTAL WIFE: "Last night I dreamt that I was in heaven." GRUFF HUSBAND: "You did, eh? Why the deuce didn't you stay there?"

FIRST elder (at the Kirk "ekellin"): "Did ye hear Dougal More snoring in the sermon?" SECOND elder: "Parfec'ly disgracfu! He's wakened 'a'!"

HE: "Do you think your father will object to our marriage?" SHE: "No, indeed; I am the oldest of a family of six girls and he'll be glad to have me off his hands."

PATIENT (feebly): "Haden't you better bleed me, doctor?" DOCTOR (rubbing his chin absent-mindedly and mistaking the question): "Wait until you are well, my dear sir."

A YOUNG MARRIED COUPLE—"Why, Charles, if I didn't actually see you yawn just now?" "Well, dearest, you know that we are now one, and I never can keep awake when I'm alone."

"WHAT would six ounces of tea come to at sixty cents a pound?" asked the teacher of a class the other day. "Leaves!" replied the bad small boy, and since then he prefers to sit down edgewise.

LADY PATRONESS (Registry Office of Charitable Society): "And why are you leaving your present place?" SMALL APPLICANT: "Please, 'm, the lady said she can do with a less experienced servant!"

JOHNNY: "Mamma, what's the use of keeping the whip you use on me behind the motto 'God bless our home'?" Mamma: "Can you suggest a better place?" "Yes, put it behind the motto, 'I need thee every hour.'"

Mrs. A.: "So your daughter is studying for the stage?" Mrs. B.: "Yes, and she is progressing very rapidly. Mrs. A.: "How far has she got?" Mrs. B.: "She has already had her photograph taken as Lady Macbeth."

THE PHARMACEUT: "Don't you know it is very wrong to fight, little boy? What does the good book say?" Tommy (who had just polished off the class bully): "I dunno. I ain't read it no further than David an' Goliath."

WIFE: "I've got a new cook-book." HUSBAND: "Confound your cook-books. They are all alike. They tell you to take so much of this and so much of that, but they don't tell how to get the money to buy the ingredients."

"DID not the sight of the boundless blue sea, bearing on its bosom white-winged fleets of commerce, fill you with emotion?" "Yes," replied the traveller, "at first it did, but after awhile it didn't fill me with anything. It emptied me."

A MIDDLEBROOME old woman was sneering at a young mother's awkwardness with her infant, and said: "I declare, a woman never ought to have a baby unless she knows how to hold it!" "Nor a tongue either," quietly responded the young mother.

BROWN: "It's terrible the way these coal dealers cheat you. There's not more than twelve hundred in that ton." Little Johnnie: "Perhaps, dad, the coal man weighed it on the same scales as you weighed that twenty-pound fish you caught."

LAWYER: "Did you give Mr. Skinfint your note for the amount, as I advised you to?" YOUNG WIDOW (weeping): "Yes, I did. I wrote him the sweetest little note that ever was, and the very next day he came and put a mortgage on my furniture."

"How did you like Mr. B.'s singing at the concert last night?" asked a lady, of a woman accustomed to surprising her friends by her unexpected speeches. "O I enjoyed it very much," was the enthusiastic reply. "He is really quite a prima donna, isn't he?"

PRINCIPAL: "So you want to leave me and go into business for yourself." Clerk: "Yes, sir." "But you have hardly had sufficient experience." "Not had sufficient experience? Haven't I gone through two bankruptcies with you? I don't think I've got much more to learn."

STRANGER: "Where does that new dentist have his office?" Policeman: "You mean the one who pulls teeth without pain?" Stranger: "Yes." Policeman: "Go right around the corner. You will have no trouble finding his office. You can hear his patients yell half a block away."

CORINNA (to her little brother, who insists on "staying up," to the great annoyance of both herself and Mr. Wilkins): "Freddy, don't you think you had better go to bed, now?" Freddy: "No; I want to see Mr. Wilkins explode before I go." Mr. Wilkins: "Good gracious! what can the child mean?" Freddy: "I heard Corinna tell mamma that you were about ready to 'pop.'"

Two ladies, during a friendly meeting in the street, got to quarrelling about their age, and used very strong language towards each other. At last, as if to end the dispute, one of them turned away and said in a very conciliatory tone of voice: "Let us not quarrel any more. I, at least, have not the heart to do it. I never knew who my mother was; she deserted me when a baby and who knows but that you may have been that heartless parent?"

"I HAVE this evening been preaching to a congregation of idiots," said a conceited young parson. "Then what was the reason you always call them 'beloved brethren'?" replied a strong-minded lady.

"LIGHTHEAD," exclaimed his excellent wife, testily, "you are a greater fool than I took you to be!" "Thanks," he said gratefully, but meekly. "That is to say, I grow upon you by acquaintance. Ah, my ownest own, you haven't half found me out yet."

C.: "What is the reason mothers who go to the watering places are always accompanied by their daughters?" D.: "That's an old custom. It goes back to the time when Rebecca captured her husband, Jacob, at the well. Ever since women have been going to watering places to catch husbands."

MISTRESS: "Bridget, I told you the other day that I didn't object to your giving your cousin a meal when he comes, but I find you feeding the policeman, the butcher's boy, the grocer's boy, the milkman, three hostlers from the next street, and the ashman." Bridget: "Shure mum, they're all me cousins?"

CHRONIC BORROWER: "Can you lend me twenty dollars for a few days?" WARY FRIEND: "Why don't you pawn your watch?" "Because it is a keepsake from my dear mother, and I don't like to part with it." "My money is a keepsake from my dear father, and I don't like to part with it, either."

JUDGE (to defendant in the witness-box): "If you were to take your hands out of your pockets it would be more respectful to the Court." Defendant: "I hope the Court will forgive me, my lord, but I simply did it for a luxury?" Judge: "A luxury!" Defendant: "Yes; my solicitor has had his hands in them up to now."

SALESMAN in shoe shop (deferentially): "I hardly think a No. 2, ma'am, will —" Customer (with some asperity): "That is the size I always wear, sir. If you have none I will go elsewhere." SALESMAN (equal to the occasion): "I was speaking of the ordinary No. 2. Here is a fine grade of shoe we call the amplified No. 2." (Sells her a pair of fives.)

LADY (to applicant for position as domestic): "My goodness! This reference is signed by Mrs. Upton." Applicant: "Yes, mum, she signed it herself, mum, after I'd been there a while, mum." "But Mrs. Upton has been dead for twenty years." "Is that so? Well! well! It's a wan place afther another Oi've been gettin' on that char-a-cotter fur twenty-loive years an' Oi never heard before that the poor leddy was dead. Given rest her soul!"

"SHAY," stammered an inebriated politician as he staggered into police headquarters the other night, "want to be arrested for poliga—hic—my." "How is this? You are no Mormon," said the officer in charge. "Yeah, I be. I-hio—jes been up to th'—hic—front gate, saw two wives jawin' me out o' th'—hic—top window. Straight business, m' fren—hic—look me up quick. Rather be in—hic—jail for polig'm'y 'n go home and meet two Mrs. Smiths."

"SAY!" he called to a Woodward Avenue grocer the other morning, "I'm in a great hurry and can't linger. My wife wants the stuff to make some mince-meat. Put it up and I'll call in as I go to dinner." "Very well," was the reply, and when he returned the grocer pointed to a heap of packages on the counter and said: "Guess I've got everything put up for you." "Gawhitaker! but you don't mean that pile is for me!" "All yours, sir." "But you don't claim that I want thirty-four ingredients to make a mince pie?" "Only the usual ingredients, sir—meat, apples, currants, raisins, allspice, pepper, vinegar, cinnamon, citron, cloves and so forth. If your wife happens to remember anything else she wants to put in just call me up by telephone. Be over the list twice and am sure I have it right."

SOCIETY.

The Queen's travelling expenses generally run to £6 per mile.

QUEEN VICTORIA has the largest bound book ever made. It is eighteen inches thick and weighs sixty three pounds. It contains the jubilee addresses of congratulation.

LADY ANNE BLUNT and her daughters are spending the winter in Egypt. They have adopted Arab dress, and their house, which is on the borders of the desert, is as primitive in construction as ordinary Arab habitations.

The Queen's life at Windsor is not quite so retired as at Cowes. Her Majesty has more guests at dinner, and more visitors are entertained at the Castle.

THERE is a touch of pathos, as well as romance, in the desire of the Empress Augusta that the hoop of gold welded on her arm on the day of her betrothal should be buried with her.

The spring hats promise to be all "lacey" and flowery, with feathers used sometimes to nod over the edge of a wide brim, and their shapes are very picturesque and becoming.

At a successful fancy ball at Cairo, the feature of the evening was a Lancers set of "devils and angels." The former presented a most satanic appearance, dressed entirely in black, with horns and long tails. The angels, who were all chosen for their beauty, were clothed in pure white, and wore golden halos.

BABY PRINCE UMBERTO D'AOSTA will own some amalgamated relations when he grows up, and may feel half puzzled what to call them. His mother is his cousin, grandmamma is Aunt Cloildie, uncles are great-uncles, and the big brothers, who have come in for most of the father's money, are cousins as well. Elegant Queen Margherita will prefer to be aunt, not great-aunt.

A FACT not generally known is that the Queen takes so lively an interest in the way the money given by Sir Edward Guinness to the London poor is to be laid out that she has very frequently honoured Lord Rowton, one of the trustees, with her views on the subject. The Queen knows a great deal about the condition of the London poor, and, according to Lord Rowton, Her Majesty's suggestions are of the greatest value.

WEDDING albums are a late novelty. A gorgeously bound volume contains the marriage certificate—usually illuminated in most artistic style—and photographs of the bride and bridegroom, bridesmaids and best man, wedding guests in their finery and the officiating clergy, with the autograph of each under the corresponding portrait. Illuminated inscriptions of date, time and place complete the record.

A WONDERFUL pin to be stuck in an evening bodice is the fac-simile of a hand mirror. The glass part is formed of a flat diamond. It is framed in tiny diamonds, and the handle is of diamonds a little larger. So clear is the large one that forms the glass that one could, with perfect success, put a miniature photograph under it, and it would be exactly as if a face were represented; it is a diamond-framed edition of a pretty woman "as in a looking-glass."

A NEW fashion has developed itself among ladies of exquisite taste, fashionable ladies in spirit, who have watchful, jealous husbands, ladies who lack the opportunity to enjoy a clandestine cocktail at home, or even the less intoxicating *crème de menthe* in the evening. This newest fad is for the Turkish baths. I know of a fashionable bath of this city where the accommodations are particularly inviting and the outfit is deliciously rich, and I know of several prominent ladies who make it their rendezvous three times a week. They have their favourite and particular "rubbers," upon whom they lavish their spare change and a vast deal of affection.

STATISTICS.

MEASURE 209 feet on each side and you will have a square acre within an inch.

THERE are in London 960 licensed lodging-houses, with accommodation for about 40,000 lodgers. In 115 of these religious services are conducted by the Lodging-house Mission.

INVESTIGATIONS show that insects flutter wings of enormous area in proportion to their weight at the rate of 200 or 300 vibrations per second; while the pelican makes one per second, the area of surface employed being a trifling fraction of that needed by the smaller creature per unit of its own weight.

DURING the year 1889 the distance traversed by the steamers of the White Star fleet was as follows:—Liverpool and New York service, 390,600 miles; London and New Zealand service, 200,500 miles; Hong Kong and San Francisco service, 245,500 miles; in addition to which there have been various voyages amounting to 28,280 miles, making a total mileage for the year of 864,880 miles.

GEMS.

"LIFE," says the Arabs, "is of two parts, that which is past—a dream; that which is to come—a wish."

So surely as the day and the night alternately follow one another, does every day when it yields to darkness, and every night when it passes into dawn, bear with it its own tale of the results which it has silently wrought upon each of us, for evil or for good.

EVERY man has two educations—that which is given to him, and the other which he gives to himself. Of the two kinds, the latter is by far the more valuable. Indeed, all that is most worthy in a man he must work out and conquer for himself. It is that which constitutes our real and best nourishment. What we are merely taught seldom nourishes the mind like that which we teach ourselves.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

HAM TOAST.—Scrape or pound some cold ham, mix it with beaten egg, season with pepper, lay it upon buttered toast, and place it in a hot oven for three or four minutes. Dried salmon, smoked tongue, potted meats, or any other relishing viands, answer equally well upon toast.

PLAIN RICE CROQUETTES.—Put one cup of rice into a kettle with a pint of milk, and a pint of water, cook slowly until the rice entirely absorbs the liquid. Season with salt, pepper, and a little onion juice, turn out to cool. When cold form into cylinders, dip egg and bread crumbs, and fry in hot suet.

SERVING BANANAS.—A favorite way of serving bananas in New Orleans is to cut them lengthwise in two pieces, dust them with powdered sugar, a little lemon juice and bits of butter, and to bake them in the oven for twenty-five minutes. They should be heated with the butter once or twice while baking, and served hot in the dish in which they are cooked.

SODA SCONES.—1 lb. flour, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoonful salt, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoonful tartaric acid, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoonful carbonate of soda, butter milk. Put the flour in a basin with the salt, carbonate of soda, and tartaric acid, mixed well together. Make it all into a soft paste with butter milk, sprinkle plenty of flour on the bake board, and turn the paste out on it. Roll it less than half-an-inch thick, and cut with a lid or round cutter; have a griddle or hot plate, on which place the scones, and bake for five minutes.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE alarming increase of murders in Belgium, within the last few years, has led to a popular demand for the re-enactment of capital punishment.

An ingenious machine for cutting and buttering bread has been invented. It is intended for use in almshouses, prisons, and such institutions. It may be worked by hand, steam, or electricity, and can cut and butter 750 loaves of bread an hour.

In China if a paper is found guilty of a "fake" or false statement not only are the editors punished but all the readers as well. This accounts, perhaps, for the fact that there are only three newspapers in China, and that subscribers are shy.

THE famous old mountain fortress of Aisirgarh, which was formerly regarded as one of the principal defences of Central India, is about to be dismantled. It stands on the summit of an almost inaccessible mountain, and has many interesting and romantic historical associations.

THE Pyramids are played out now. There is an hotel quite handy at the bottom where they serve *puré à la Cleopatre* and *consommé Pharo* precisely as if they were in Northumberland-avenue. Soon there will be a lift to the top, and on the summit of the big pyramid will reside a restaurant and a *camere obscure*.

THE number of drunkards has steadily diminished since the establishment of free kitchens in Vienna. These free restaurants also seem to have greatly improved the health of the lower classes. Derangements of the stomach, formerly the most frequent cases in Vienna hospitals, have decreased to one-third of the number ten years ago.

A KISS is said to be like a sermon, because it requires at least two heads and an application. Among the parts of speech it is defined as a "conjunction." "Stolen kisses," says the proverb, "are sweetest;" and some humorist confirms this by saying they are sweetest "when *sympotically* obtained." Of course, "kissing goes by favour." Someone calls kisses "interrogation points in the literature of love."

THE earliest printed almanac of which there is any record appeared at Vienna in the year 1460. Fourteen years later Regiomontanus, a German mathematician, resident in Hungary, began a famous series of almanacs extending from 1475 to 1506. These contained only the eclipses and places of the planets. The first almanac printed in England was translated from the French, and brought out in 1497.

MOST men speak at the rate of about a hundred and twenty words a minute; Mr. Gladstone's speeches are commonly a hundred and fifty, but Father Ignatius frequently spoke with splendid eloquence for an hour at a time at the rate of one hundred and eighty to two hundred words a minute, and many a short-hand-writer, anxious to win his spurs for "speed," has "sat under" the amateur monk and taken down the sermons as a supreme test of his ability.

It has long been accepted as a fact that married couples, who are not only exposed to the same conditions of life, but the influence of whose minds must necessarily react upon each other, assumed more or less facial resemblance to each other. The Photographic Society of Geneva, Switzerland, with a view to determine this question, have made photographs of seventy-eight young couples. The result is that in twenty-four cases the resemblance in the personal appearance of the husband and wife was greater than that of brother and sister; in thirty cases it was equally great, and in only twenty-four was there total absence of resemblance.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

SWEET SEVENTEEN.—The 27th of July, 1873, was on Sunday; the 18th of February, 1836, was on Thursday.

DICK.—The Jura is a range of mountains between Switzerland and France. They occupy a belt of country averaging about thirty miles in width.

TOSCA.—Both ancient and modern writers record the achievements of penmen whose writing was in so small a hand that it was invisible to the naked eye.

AN INQUIRER.—1. The 11th of April, 1851, was on Friday. 2. If the husband is alive he will take his wife's wedding-ring; if not, it is generally given to the eldest daughter.

SUFFERER.—Incomnia is very often effectually relieved by one or two doses of nutmeg, grated into a fine powder and mixed with milk, when much stronger agents have failed.

SCENT.—There is a kind of resin which is found on the trunk of old olive trees, which has the odour of vanilla, and in Italy it is used for perfumery, but we do not know how it is prepared.

CLARA.—If a young lady loves a single gentleman forty years of age, and keeps it all to herself, we do not see how anybody could charge her with impropriety; because, of course, nobody but herself would know anything about it.

SIR JAMES.—You ought to call on your aunt, acknowledge your error, and ask her forgiveness. Such an affectionate aunt as you describe yours to be is about as valuable a possession as a boy can have, and one which should not be inconsiderately forfeited.

BERTHA.—Diamonds were found in Brazil in 1728. The diamond was first proved to be combustible in 1694 by the Florentine academicians, who found that when exposed to the heat of the sun in the focus of a large lens it burnt away with a blue lambent flame.

J. C.—1. Fortune-telling, if not practised as a trade, is an innocent amusement, and is resorted to to while away the time in social circles. 2. Let your eyes and eyelashes alone. 3. Flirtations are always more or less reprehensible. 4. No knowledge of its origin.

ANNIE.—Do not do anything so silly. You will soon find out whether the young man likes you or not. Young girls cannot be too particular in their behaviour, and should never do anything to attract the other sex. Men soon tire of girls who make attempts to catch them.

FISHERY.—There was an old Highland tradition that the herrings quitted the coasts where blood had been shed, and it seems that this notion was revived after the battle of Copenhagen, "when it was said that they had deserted the Baltic on account of the noise of the guns."

BIO DES.—It is rather hard for the majority of people to associate intellect with fat, yet some of the greatest men the world has ever known were plump even to obesity. Napoleon was decidedly *embonpoint*. Doctor Johnson was stout even to fatness. So was his biographical shadow, Boswell.

F. F. C.—You can send a telegram to any place in the kingdom at the rate of sixpence for every twelve words, but if it is to a place at a distance from the office at which it is received, there will be postage to pay as well as the price of the message; sixpence per mile is the payment for delivery in such a case.

B. B.—Vitus was a Sicilian, martyred by Diocletian, A.D. 305-315. He was made one of the fourteen "helpers in need" in the Roman Catholic calendar, and canonized. Persons suffering from various diseases prayed to him, and St. Vitus's dance was originally a procession of men and women jumping along the roads to his chapel.

IGNORANT ANNIE.—We have repeatedly stated that after a gentleman has made the acquaintance of a lady, or been introduced to her, no matter where, or under what circumstances, the rule is that he is to wait for her to recognize him on meeting her in the street. The rules of etiquette are not applied with equal strictness, however, in all localities.

GERALDINE.—The Hebrew ladies perfumed their beds with myrrh, cloves and cinnamon, and their long ringlets with frankincense, attar of roses and musk, besides carrying at the ends of their necklaces alabaster vials full of expensive spikenard. The Talmud encouraged this sort of thing, by directing one tenth of a wife's dowry to be set apart for her perfumery.

PUELLID.—If the snow be melted it becomes drinkable water. Nevertheless, although it melted before entering the mouth, it assuages thirst like other water; when melted in the mouth it has the opposite effect. To render this paradox more striking, we have only to remember that ice, which melts more slowly in the mouth, is very efficient in allaying thirst.

JUDITH.—Caen point is a bobbin lace which has only glory in its own country. There is no more flexible lace if worked with the kind of thread made on purpose for its manufacture in the fax mills of Normandy. It never wears out, and no trimming is more charming when used for a falling neck frill. The black Caen lace is superior to Chantilly for bonnet trimming.

TOM.—Napoleon I. signed two acts of abdication. The first was signed on April 11, 1814. He was allowed the sovereignty of the island of Elba, with a revenue of 6,000,000 francs. From Elba he escaped on February 26, 1815, and on March 20 Louis XVIII. was compelled to give up the throne. Next occurred the memorable battle of Waterloo, and Napoleon hurried back to Paris, where the second abdication was signed on June 22.

C. C.—Apples aid the stomach in the digestion of other foods, and, therefore, the best results are obtained from eating them after, rather than before, meals. If one feels that he has eaten more dinner than is compatible with his after comfort, he will find that an apple will facilitate an early digestion and afford greater relief than an alcoholic drink or a drug-store prescription.

DATA.—The formation of a species of record of facts and ideas, by means of knots tied upon cords, was common among the inhabitants of Peru, on the discovery of that country by the Spaniards. These knotted cords, or quipos, as they were called, seem to have served instead of written records, and to have been preserved in bundles like the archives of more civilized nations.

MUDLARK.—"How far is it from London Bridge to the First of August?" is a venerable cockney "catch." The "First of August" was a riverside public-house about 200 yards from London Bridge. It was named after the date on which the Doggett badge is rowed for by the Thames watermen. The public-house has now disappeared, the tradition being that it was burned in the Tooley-street fire.

HOW GRANDMA DANCED.

Grandma told me all about it;
Told me so I couldn't doubt it;
How she danced—my grandma danced—
Long ago.

How she held her pretty head,
How her dainty skirt she spread,
How she turned her little toes—
Smiling little human rose!
Long ago.

Grandma's hair was bright and sunny,
Dimpled cheeks, too—ah, how funny!
Really quite a pretty girl,
Long ago.

Bless her! why, she wears a cap,
Grandma does, and takes a nap
Every single day; and yet
Grandma danced the minuet
Long ago.

Now she sits there, rocking, rocking,
Always knitting grandma's stocking
(Every girl was taught to knit
Long ago.)

Yet her figure is so neat,
I can almost see her now
Bending to her partner's bow,
Long ago.

Grandma says our modern jumping,
Hopping, rushing, whirling, bumping,
Would have shocked the gentle folk
Long ago.

No—they moved with stately grace,
Everything in proper place;
Gliding slowly forward, then
Slowly courtyouring back again,
Long ago.

Modern ways are quite alarming,
Grandma says; but boys were charming—
Girls and boys, I mean, of course—
Long ago.

Bravely modest, grandly shy—
What if all of us should try
Just to feel like those who met
In their graceful minuet,
Long ago.

With the minuet in fashion,
Who could fly into a passion?
All would wear the calm they wore
Long ago.

In time to come, if I perchance
Should tell my grandchild of our dance,
I should really like to say
"We did, dear, in some such way,
Long ago."

R. W.

ANXIOUS ALICE.—1. You had very much better leave your hair alone; the colour and style of it most likely suit your face. Tampering with the hair in any way is apt to make it brittle and spoil it in every way. 2. We never heard of the remedy. You had better ask a druggist. 3. Warts can be cured by the use of dry pipe-clay. Rub it in well many times a day; whenever you think of it, in fact.

WORKER.—Magnanimity of nature, or love of study and art, will make a bright, glad face; but, contrary to this, a man may have a face that does not please anybody, because of a love of self to the exclusion of all others, notwithstanding his learning and worldly shrewdness. Soldiers get a hard, severe look; over-worked toilers constantly look tired; reporters look inquisitive; mathematicians look studious; judges become grave, even when off the bench; the man who has had domestic trouble looks all broken up.

OUT OF WORK.—What makes you think you must emigrate in order to get something to do? If you desire to change your employment, and see something you prefer to the work you are now engaged in, why not go for it? That is what you would have to do in the Colonies or States if you wished to get on, and it is hardly worth while to pay £20 for the privilege of doing out there what you can do for nothing. What you require is decision and courage.

R. F. LLOYD.—We have received your very kind and courteous letter, and thanking you for the information so kindly given, we can only add that the little paragraphs in the column to which you refer are culled from various sources, and not inserted by us as original matter. We shall be very glad to use the information you have so clearly set before us, as we are frequently asked questions on the subject.

HETERA.—The best possible thing to do when you feel too weak to carry anything through is to go to bed and sleep for a week if you can. This is the only recuperation of brain-power, the only actual recuperation of brain-force, because, during sleep, the brain is in a state of rest, in a condition to receive and appropriate particles of nutriment from the blood, which takes the place of those which have been consumed in previous labour.

ROSEBUD.—The lines—
"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small;
Though with patience He stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all!"

are from Longfellow's translation of Friedrich von Logau's "Sinnegedichte," but the first line was originally taken from the "Oracula Sibyllina," lib. viii., line 14.

SAILOR BOY.—The work is hard and the life rough. Very little respect is paid on board ship to a boy's social position ashore. But if you really like the sea, and make up your mind to the life, you will soon surmount all the petty discomforts of the position, and learn to look forward to the time when you will have a ship of your own and a crew to do your bidding, as you will have to begin by doing the will of your own commander.

D. D.—The first lottery known in England was drawn at the West door of St Paul's Cathedral in 1569, *(emp. Elizabeth)*. The amount was £30,000, which in those days was very considerable. It consisted of 40,000 tickets at ten shillings each, and the profits of the speculation were to be appropriated to the repair of the harbours of the kingdom. The drawing was a very long affair, being continuous a day and night from the 11th January to the 6th May.

MARY.—An open mouth exposes the throat to unnecessary cold, which chills the delicate membrane, and to impurities which, lodging in it, are frequently productive of serious results, while a moving tongue keeps the lips wet and in a constant state of eruption. Lips will never chap or crack if kept dry, as there is sufficient oil in the skin to protect them. Soreness of the lips is an evidence of some disorder of the stomach. Fresh, rosy lips mean health of body.

BOUND TO WIN.—It is doubtless true that a man should try to save a competency before he reaches the age of forty; but it is not true that if he does not do so he never can accomplish that desirable object after that age. A man who has not laid a pretty fair foundation for a fortune—that is to say, who has not acquired a profession, or become well-established in business, or in some mode, sense or manner got fairly on the track—by the time he reaches the age of forty, will, as a general thing, undoubtedly have a severe struggle with fortune during the rest of his life.

GERALD HURST.—If you will let us advise you will remain content with the applause which your comic songs receive from your friends. Should you persist in attempting to get a footing on the music-hall stage you will ruin yourself for other work, and the chances are ten to one you will ruin yourself for singing, too, within a very short time. It is difficult to induce managers to accept the services of one who has only his own recommendation to offer. When he does so the salary he offers is usually a shilling or two over what the candidate might earn at stone-throwing.

ICE QUEEN.—The custom of ladies having the privilege of offering marriage in leap year is taken from an old Act of the Scottish Parliament, passed during the thirteenth century, whereby it was—"Ordonat that during ye reign of her maiest blaisit Maletie, Margaret, like maiden, ladie of faith high and low estate, shall have libertie to speak the man she likes. Off he refuse to tak her to be his wyf, he shall be mulct in the sum of one hundredry pundis, or less, as his estate may be, except and alswe, gif he can mak it appeare that he is betrothit to another woman, then he shall be free."

OLD READER.—Animals and birds are grouped as follows: A herd of swine, a skunk of foxes, a pack of wolves, a drove of oxen or cattle, a sounder of hares, a troop of monkeys, a pride of lions, a sleuth of bears, a band of horses, a herd of ponies, a covey of partridges, a shoal of pheasants, a wisp of snipe, a school of whales, a school of herrings, a run of fish, a flight of doves, a muster of peacocks, a sedge of herons, a building of rooks, a brook of grouse, a swarm of bees, gnats, flies, etc., a stand of flowers, a watch of nightingales, a cast of hawks, a flock of geese, sheep, goats, etc., a bevy of girls, a galaxy of stars and a crowd of men or boys.

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